

# ABOUT•TURN

**The Communist Party and the Outbreak of  
the Second World War: The Verbatim Record of  
the Central Committee Meetings, 1939**



*Leaving Henry St., after being  
searched on Oct 1939.*

**Edited by FRANCIS KING & GEORGE MATTHEWS  
With an introduction by Monty Johnstone**

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# *ABOUT TURN*

## **The British Communist Party and the Second World War**

The Verbatim Record of the  
Central Committee Meetings of  
25 September and 2-3 October 1939

edited by  
*Francis King*  
and  
*George Matthews*

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*Monty Johnstone*  
*Francis King*  
*George Matthews*

# Chronology

## August to October 1939

### August

- 21 Germans announce Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop's forthcoming trip to Moscow
- 22 Communist International secretariat calls for 'continued struggle against the aggressors, especially German fascism' in the event of the conclusion of a German-Soviet non-aggression pact.
- 23 Treaty of Non-Aggression (with secret protocol) is signed between Germany and USSR. *Daily Worker* publishes CPGB central committee statement welcoming Soviet-German negotiations.
- 25 *Daily Worker* editorial hails conclusion of pact as offering a new chance for peace.
- 30 *Daily Worker* publishes CPGB central committee statement calling for Chamberlain's removal, the establishment of a powerful peace front, and victory over fascism in the event of war.

### September

- 1 Germany invades Poland. Chamberlain issues an ultimatum to Germany, demanding that Germany cease aggression against Poland within 48 hours, or else face war with Britain.
- 2 *Daily Worker* carries headline 'Nazis Plunge World into War', and features CPGB central committee statement supporting 'all necessary measures to secure the victory of democracy over fascism', while calling for Chamberlain's removal. CPGB statement also issued in 250,000 copies.
- 3 Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- 4 *Daily Worker* editorial declares: 'It is a war that *CAN* and *MUST* be won.'

- 7 Stalin talks to Dimitrov about the character of the war and the tasks of the Comintern.
- 8 Dimitrov draws up theses for the Communist Parties on the war.
- 9 Communist International secretariat approves and issues directives, describing the war as 'predatory' and 'unjust' on both sides.  
Goering makes a 'peace offer' to Britain and France on the basis of accepting German domination of Poland.
- 11 *Daily Worker* makes an editorial comment on Goering's speech under the headline: 'To betray Poland is to betray Britain'.
- 14 CPGB issues Harry Pollitt's pamphlet *How to Win the War*. *Daily Worker* receives a 'press telegram' from the USSR, describing the war as 'imperialist' and 'predatory'. Harry Pollitt suppresses the telegram.
- 16 *News Chronicle* reports US Communist leader Earl Browder's interview, in which he denounces the war as imperialist.
- 17 Soviet troops enter Eastern Poland.
- 18 *Daily Worker* hails the Soviet invasion as a 'Counter-blow against the Nazis'.
- 19 Harry Pollitt publishes an article in the *Daily Worker* defending Soviet actions in Poland as being in the interests of the Polish and Soviet peoples.
- 24 CPGB Central Committee meeting opens. Most speakers support the existing CPGB line of 'struggle on two fronts'. D.F. Springhall returns from Moscow that evening.
- 25 Springhall reports the Communist International's position on the war and responds to questions. The Central Committee meeting is adjourned for a Political Bureau meeting, and then adjourned for one week. Harry Pollitt hands over his responsibilities as general secretary to a three-man secretariat.
- 28 USSR and Germany sign a Boundary and Friendship Treaty, with secret protocols and a declaration calling for an end to the war.
- 30 *Daily Worker* carries a headline: 'Peace Offer to Europe'. It also carries the 'Editorial Board' statement criticised by R.P. Dutt.

*October*

- 2 CPGB Central Committee reconvenes.
- 3 CPGB Central Committee concludes session.
- 4 *Daily Worker* publishes CPGB central committee statement outlining its new attitude opposing the war.
- 7 CPGB Central Committee manifesto is published in 350,000 copies.

## *Introduction*

### *Monty Johnstone*

The document published here for the first time gives a unique insight into one of the most dramatic policy turns in the history of the international Communist movement. It records in full the tense and complex debate which took place in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) when instructions for a total reversal of its support for the war arrived from the headquarters of the Communist International in Moscow. The Comintern was the international body whose decisions were binding on the national Communist Parties, all of which were affiliated to it until its dissolution in 1943. On 9 September 1939 the Secretariat of its Executive Committee had, on Stalin's instructions, adopted directives laying down that the world war was to be opposed as imperialist and unjust on both sides and claiming that 'the division of states into fascist and democratic states has lost its former sense'. Communist Parties – 'particularly of France, Britain, Belgium and the USA' – which had taken a different stand 'must immediately correct their political line'.<sup>1</sup>

It was in fact all the world's Communist Parties which were now required to jettison their long-standing principled position that aggressive German fascism had to be opposed by all possible means as the greatest threat to peace and progress. This had continued to be their position even in the period immediately following the signing of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact on 23 August 1939, which they had approved as a diplomatic move on the part of the Soviet government. When the Comintern directive reached them it caused widespread confusion and very considerable difficulties. The British



Communist Party displayed a greater degree of initial independence, particularly on the part of its general secretary, Harry Pollitt, than any other Communist Party towards the new line. The objections raised by leading British Communists were shared in varying degrees by Communists in other countries.<sup>2</sup> The present 'stenogram' is however the only record so far to be published, and possibly in existence anywhere, which provides a blow-by-blow account of the debate carried on in private by top Communist leaders and reveals the reasoning whereby they convinced themselves and each other to make an ill-judged about turn of the first magnitude.

From 24 September until 3 October 1939 (with an adjournment from 26 September until 1 October) the argument raged in the Central Committee of the CPGB about the character of the war which Britain and France had declared on Nazi Germany on 3 September following its invasion of Poland two days earlier. The reader can here follow the debate at first hand, starting with the report on 25 September of Dave Springhall who had just arrived from Moscow with the Comintern Secretariat's anti-war line. Britain's best known Communist leaders were deeply divided. Three out of the four British members of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (Harry Pollitt, J.R. Campbell and William Gallacher) rejected the contention from Moscow that they should oppose the war and 'under no conditions defend fascist Poland' (p.69). That view was supported and argued for by the fourth ECCI member (Dutt). At the end of the ten days the majority reversed its previous unanimous line of 'struggle on two fronts' – militarily against Nazi Germany abroad and politically against Chamberlain at home. It opted instead for 'the struggle on one front against our own imperialism', urged by Dutt (p.78).

For the past half-century the transcript of this meeting, crucial for elucidating and assessing perhaps the most disputed (both factually and politically) episode in the history of the CPGB and the Communist International, has lain locked away in archives in the USSR. Access to this

unique source today is one result of the new Soviet *glasnost* and the kind co-operation of the Soviet Communist Party's Institute of Marxism-Leninism, to whom we express our thanks for sending the microfilm to our Communist Party, in whose archive it is now stored.

### *Background to the Debate*

In the years leading up to the outbreak of the second world war the struggle to defend democracy against fascism and its appeasers had been at the centre of the campaigns of the small but growing Communist Party of Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> In this it was at one with the whole international Communist movement, as expressed most clearly at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935. In his report, Georgi Dimitrov, its general secretary, had stressed that although Communists were opposed to all forms of capitalism, 'it is not at all a matter of indifference to us what kind of political regime exists in any given country: whether a bourgeois-democratic, even with democratic rights and liberties greatly curtailed, or a bourgeois dictatorship in its open, fascist form'. He described fascism as 'the most barbaric regime of exploitation and suppression' of working people.<sup>4</sup> This represented a rejection of the sectarian position which the Comintern had taken in the 1929-33 period. At that time it had denied that there was any significant distinction between what was seen as merely two forms of the 'dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. Now it called for a broad people's front against fascism and reaction at home, while seeking internationally to develop a peace front of the USSR and the western capitalist democracies (Britain, France and the USA) to stem aggressive expansion of the fascist powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). In 1936 Dimitrov was to stress particularly the difference between fascist aggressor states and the capitalist governments which were interested in maintaining peace. He distinguished this situation from the position which Lenin wrote about in the 1914-18 war, when the world 'was divided into military imperialist coalitions which were equally striving to establish their world hegemony'.<sup>5</sup>

In this period the CPGB played a key role in organising support in Britain for republican Spain. Hundreds of its members fought and died fighting fascism in the International Brigade. It bitterly opposed the Munich Agreement of 1938, which granted Hitler part of Czechoslovakia in exchange for what Chamberlain pathetically claimed was 'peace in our time'. Harry Pollitt warned that the 'appetite of the fascist tiger grows with every fresh kill. Can we be so blind as not to see that our turn will come unless we make a stand now?'<sup>6</sup> After Munich the party campaigned tirelessly for a British-French-USSR pact to prevent further fascist aggression.

Negotiations took place in Moscow in the summer of 1939 between these three powers with a view to organising resistance to fascist aggression which particularly threatened Poland. The Soviet government became suspicious and concerned at the lack of authority or desire on the part of the relatively low level British and French delegations to secure agreement to the most urgent Soviet requests, notably for their troops to be permitted to enter Poland to make direct contact with the enemy if Hitler invaded. There was fear that Chamberlain and Daladier were still seeking to appease Hitler in the hope that he would attack the Soviet Union. It was in this situation that the world learnt on 22 August that the USSR and Germany were about to negotiate the non-aggression pact which was to be signed the next day.

The pact was unexpected and was the first of many 'shocks' to which we find Central Committee speakers referring. The Central Committee immediately issued a statement approving the prospective pact as 'a victory for peace and socialism against the war plans of fascism and the pro-fascist policy of Chamberlain'. It claimed that the pact 'places before the British people, in particular, the sharpest urgency of the conclusion of the Anglo-Soviet Pact and the removal of Chamberlain'. It went on to warn against the threat to Poland's independence which arose from Chamberlain putting pressure on Poland to do a deal with Hitler. It continued to affirm the need to 'resist fascism whether it comes from abroad or at home'.<sup>7</sup> On

29 August, with the Nazi threat to Poland becoming more palpable every day, the Central Committee declared that 'there must be no concessions to fascist aggression.'<sup>8</sup> In public meetings up and down the country Communist speakers warned against the danger of a new Munich.

When Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September, Harry Pollitt drafted a party manifesto. Dated 2 September, it was issued in the name of the Central Committee whose members gave it their unanimous support. It was the logical continuation of the Party's years of opposition to fascist aggression and appeasement, arguing the need to fight fascism abroad and Chamberlain at home. Its 'uppermost consideration' was that 'the victory of fascism represents not only a conquest of markets, colonies, sources of raw materials, etc., it also leads to the forcible destruction of every democratic right and liberty that the working class has fought so bitterly, and at such cost and sacrifice, to win from its enemies'.<sup>9</sup>

Reporting the declaration of war the previous day, the *Daily Worker* of 4 September proclaimed: 'The war is here. It is a war that *CAN* and *MUST* be won.' Poland's military resistance to the invaders was reported prominently and sympathetically, and 'energetic warfare' was urged in the west to help.<sup>10</sup> The editorial in the *Daily Worker* of 11 September was headed: 'To Betray Poland is to Betray Britain.' It urged rejection of a Nazi peace offer which entailed leaving Germany a free hand in Poland.

The party's line was amplified in a hard-hitting pamphlet by Harry Pollitt entitled *How to Win the War*, which appeared on 14 September. Pollitt recognised that the rulers of Britain and France were motivated by their own imperialist interests, but argued that, regardless of this, the action taken by them in declaring war on Germany 'under considerable pressure from their own peoples' was 'not only helping the Polish people's fight, but is actually, for the first time, challenging the Nazi aggression which has brought Europe into crisis after crisis for the last three years'.<sup>11</sup> In a memorable passage he declared: 'To stand aside from this conflict, to contribute only revolutionary-sounding phrases while the fascist

beasts ride roughshod over Europe, would be a betrayal of everything our forbears have fought to achieve in the course of long years of struggle against capitalism.'<sup>12</sup> According to Gallacher at the October Central Committee, Dutt had at the time complimented Pollitt on his pamphlet as one of the finest things he had produced (p.91).

*What the Comintern Archives Show*

As yet unknown to the British Communist leaders, the Comintern Secretariat had already decided on its diametrically opposed estimate of the war. At the kind invitation of the director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party I was able recently to study the minutes of the Secretariat and Presidium of the Comintern for this crucial period. Unfortunately the Central Party Archive of the Institute, where the Comintern archives are preserved, does not possess, and has so far been unable to trace, transcripts of the full proceedings of these meetings.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless the minutes are invaluable for establishing when and by what bodies the new international line was approved

No plenary meetings of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) were held after August 1935 following the Seventh World Congress, which had elected it. At that meeting the Executive had elected a Presidium, which included Pollitt and Gallacher, and a smaller Secretariat with no British member. It was this latter body in which all the main decisions were approved, and statements drafted on the war, sometimes in the name of ECCI. Its members at this time were Dimitrov, General Secretary, Manuilsky (of the CPSU), Pieck (of the German CP), Kuusinen (from Finland), Marty (from France) and Gottwald (from Czechoslovakia). 'Ercoli' (Togliatti of the Italian CP), who was also a member, was at this time in France (where he was under arrest from September 1939 until February 1940). Diaz (from Spain) was co-opted in September 1939, and Florin (from Germany) attended meetings as a candidate member.

The Secretariat met on 22 August 1939 when Soviet-German talks were about to open with a view to concluding

the non-aggression pact which was to be signed the next day. It decided that such a pact would 'not exclude the possibility and the necessity of agreement between Britain, France and the USSR for the combined rebuff to the aggressors'. It spoke of the need for the parties 'to continue even more energetically the struggle against the aggressors, especially German fascism'.<sup>14</sup> This approach was reflected in the September 1939 issue of *The Communist International* which, alongside Molotov's 31 August speech to the Supreme Soviet on the Soviet-German pact, carried articles denouncing German fascism as 'the worst regime of violence known to history', pointing out that France 'is menaced by German aggression', and that 'no nation, no country is secure in the face of it'.<sup>15</sup>

At its next sitting on 1 September the Secretariat heard a report by Dimitrov 'on the position of the Communist Parties in relation to the new international situation'. After recording that the Communist Parties 'basically took a correct position on the Soviet-German pact', the meeting decided that the French Party was making a mistake in allegedly entrusting the defence of their country to the Daladier-Bonnet government, which had strengthened fascist Germany.<sup>16</sup> After continuing the discussion the next day, the Secretariat set up a commission consisting of Dimitrov, Kuusinen and Manuisky to work out directives for the parties on the war.

The directives were to represent a fundamental break with the approach hitherto adopted by the Comintern. They rejected the crucial distinction between fascist and democratic states and the need to resist Nazi aggression. All the indications are that the initiative and responsibility for this *volte-face* were Stalin's. We now know that Dimitrov had a discussion with the Soviet dictator on 7 September, recording the latter's views on the situation in his diary.<sup>17</sup> I was told at the Central Party Archive in Moscow that they do not have this diary, which would have gone with Dimitrov's personal papers to the Central Party Archive in his native Bulgaria, from which we have requested a copy. A recent article by Professor Kirill Shirinya, of the Moscow

Institute of Marxism-Leninism, makes clear how pivotal was this interview, which took place in the presence of Molotov and Zhdanov. The eminent historian of the international Communist movement writes:

Brief notes taken by Dimitrov expound Stalin's instructions. He said that the war that was in progress was waged by two groups of capitalist countries (rich and poor in terms of colonies, raw materials, etc.) for a re-carving of the world, for world domination. We would like them to have a really bad fight and weaken each other. It would not be bad if the richest capitalist countries (Britain, in particular) were undermined by the hands of Germany. In Stalin's words, Hitler was weakening and undermining the capitalist system without knowing or wishing it.

Stalin especially emphasised the idea that whereas before it was absolutely right to counterpose bourgeois-democratic regimes to fascism, the situation changed with the beginning of the war. According to him, the division of capitalist states into fascist and democratic ones no longer made any sense. He suggested that popular and national front slogans be renounced and said that to support them during the war meant to side with the bourgeoisie.

Referring to Poland, Stalin said: The destruction of that state in present day conditions would mean that one bourgeois fascist state will cease to exist. Would it be bad if we managed to spread the socialist system to new territories and population in consequence of the defeat of Poland? Stalin clearly hinted that the fate of Poland had already been predetermined.

Stalin was of the opinion that Communists in warring countries should oppose their governments, proceeding from the imperialist character of the war. He suggested that the Presidium of the Comintern Executive Committee should tell the working class that the war in progress at that time was a war for world domination and that the rulers of capitalist countries were fighting for their imperialist interests and that the war would not bring the working people anything but suffering and deprivation. Thus, Stalin gave the Comintern instructions actually aimed at scaling down open anti-fascist propaganda.

Stalin demanded that the Comintern's line be geared to his own foreign policy moves and plans so as to preclude uncontrollable events giving Hitler a pretext for accusing



the Soviet-Union of anti-fascist actions carried out through the Comintern.<sup>18</sup>

The theses, drawn up, dated and initialled by Dimitrov the day after this interview with Stalin, were approved, apparently without alteration, by the Secretariat at its meeting of 9 September.<sup>19</sup> The minutes show that Springhall was mistaken in his statement that the meeting continued on 10 September (see p.60). There is nothing in the minutes to indicate that these theses were not unanimously adopted, although a GDR historian has stated that the German Communists Florin and Pieck made a written objection to them.<sup>20</sup>

The Secretariat's directives on 'the policy and tactics of the Communist Parties in relation to the war' were now transmitted to the individual parties. They constitute the 'short thesis' which Dutt was to read out to the British Central Committee on 2 October (see p.69), but they include one additional paragraph to which Springhall referred on 25 September (see p.56). This stated that 'the Communist Parties, particularly of France, Britain, Belgium and the USA, which have taken up positions at variance with this standpoint, must immediately correct their political line'.<sup>21</sup>

It is clear that initially the Comintern Secretariat, like the CPGB and other parties, saw no contradiction between support on the diplomatic plane for the Soviet-German non-aggression pact and politically and militarily stepping up the struggle against fascism and Nazi aggression. Indeed Shirinya, in the article quoted above, refers to a letter from Dimitrov and Manuilsky, the CPSU representative in the Comintern, to Stalin expressing the view that the French Communist Party, whose position was similar to that of the CPGB, 'should carry on with its position of resistance to aggression emanating from Nazi Germany'. It should, they believed, 'support actions taken to strengthen defence capability'.<sup>22</sup>

By 7 September, after a couple of weeks waiting to see how the international situation would evolve after the signing of the German-Soviet pact, Stalin had decided to

give top priority to cementing relations with Hitler. In order to remove a potential obstacle to this he decided that the Comintern must overturn its previous line, in the same way that four years later he would approve the dissolution of the International to strengthen relations with his western allies.<sup>23</sup> There is no evidence that the about-turn in 1939 was the result of a serious discussion in the Comintern leadership based on its 'wider experience and wisdom', as Dutt was to claim subsequently.<sup>24</sup> Quite the contrary, the evidence cited above lends credence to the present Soviet view that it was imposed by Stalin, who 'demanded that the leadership of the Comintern should hold precisely to the line of Soviet diplomacy, and to all intents and purposes forced it for two years to abandon the conclusions of the Seventh World Congress and the open exposure of Hitler fascism'.<sup>25</sup>

*Transmitting the Comintern Directive*

The Comintern Secretariat's 9 September directive on the war took widely different lengths of time to reach its affiliated parties. Whilst the British party did not receive it until the last week in September, Earl Browder, general secretary of the Communist Party of the United States, must have received it during the night of 11–12 September. On 11 September he had delivered a speech in Madison Square Garden, New York, denouncing 'the bloody fascist dictatorships of Germany, Japan and Italy' as 'the immediate instigators and perpetrators of war', which could be 'halted in their march toward world domination only by superior force'.<sup>26</sup> The next day he gave an interview to the New York *Daily Worker* in which, paraphrasing the Comintern Secretariat's directives, he claimed in marked contrast that 'what we have to deal with is an imperialist war in which the rulers of both sides are equally guilty; it is not a war waged for the destruction of fascism, but is carried on to extend and perpetuate imperialist control over the world'.<sup>27</sup> Referring in later years to having seen these views of Browder's reported in the London *News Chronicle* of 16 September 1939, Harry Pollitt was to note that he 'knew Browder well enough' to

have realised that his new position 'did not represent any original thinking on his part'.<sup>28</sup>

Years after his expulsion from the CPUSA in 1946 Browder told his friend Philip J. Jaffe how, before the war broke out, Dimitrov had arranged for him to acquire a short wave radio receiver on which coded messages would be transmitted to him from the Comintern during pre-arranged night hours.<sup>29</sup> There can be no doubt that Browder, like Communist Party leaders in a number of other countries,<sup>30</sup> received the new line in this way.

It must remain a mystery why the Comintern directive was not transmitted equally quickly in the same way to the Communist Parties of Great Britain and France which, operating in belligerent countries, were most directly involved. The French Communist Party maintained its initial line of support for the war against Nazi Germany until a depleted meeting of its Central Committee on 21 September, which called for peace, declaring that the war 'is no longer in reality an anti-fascist and anti-Hitler war'.<sup>31</sup> This followed the return of Raymond Guyot, the French general secretary of the Young Communist International, from Comintern headquarters shortly before 19 September, when he went into the army. French Communist general secretary Maurice Thorez, in private notes made in November 1939, refers to 'pressure from Cl[ément]', the Comintern representative, and 'the pretty clear directives of the CI [Communist International] transmitted by RG [Raymond Guyot]'.<sup>32</sup> Guyot clearly played a similar role for the French party to that played a few days later by Springhall for the British.

#### *Central Committee Session of 24 September:*

##### *Waiting For Springhall*

Harry Pollitt opened the first wartime meeting of the Central Committee on Sunday 24 September. For reasons of space the transcript of that day's session is not included in this volume, but I shall attempt to summarise the main drift of the discussion.

Pollitt started by explaining the unexpected situation which had arisen since the 2 September Manifesto had

been published, which had led to 'postponing' the planned emergency national conference designed to 'get the whole party clear and united behind its line'.<sup>33</sup> On 14 September the *Daily Worker* had received a Soviet press telegram referring to the war as 'an imperialist and predatory war for new redivision of the world, which is waged to the tune of "Defence of small nations", a robber war kindled from all sides by the hands of two imperialist groups of powers'.<sup>34</sup> Pollitt explained that he 'took the responsibility of suppressing the telegram because that formulation was in absolute contradiction to the manifesto of the Central Committee, and up to the moment that the telegram was received no member of the Central Committee had written in making any criticism or expressing any doubts as to the line of the Central Committee Manifesto'. Following the receipt of the telegram differences of opinion were expressed in the Party's Political Bureau, where there had previously been unanimity.<sup>35</sup>

Pollitt argued very strongly against changing the line. He emphasised here, as he would again on 2 October, that fascism remained the main enemy and the greatest danger, as the party had recognised since 1933. This meant that the party should continue to support 'any resistance on the part of any country or people to fascist aggression'. Hence the need to support the 'epic struggle' of the Polish people against the Nazi invaders, and to work decisively to win the war. The fact that the Soviet Union had found it necessary to sign a non-aggression pact in order not to be left to meet a fascist offensive on its own did not make a war waged to 'defend the British people from fascism' into an unjust imperialist war like the 1914 one. On the home front, he argued for sharpening the struggle against Chamberlain and against capitalist attacks on trade unionists and democratic rights.

D.F. (Dave) Springhall, the party's representative at Comintern headquarters, was expected from Moscow at any moment 'with the possibility of our having to face up to a revision of the line'. Pollitt explained his predicament: 'I know what I want, but I am paralysed, I feel like a caged lion, waiting for Springhall to come back. We are all like a

lot of rabbits in front of a snake, wondering whether we are on the right or wrong line. My own point is that we are on the right line.'

Dutt, who spoke next, was also waiting for Springhall but with somewhat less trepidation. If Pollitt was waiting but holding to his convictions, Dutt gave the impression of waiting but hedging his bets. Since the new Comintern line was not yet fully explained, he did not wish to commit himself too definitely. It was a question of facing 'certain new problems' and of 'taking stock'. Whilst maintaining that 'we are not here to wait to be told everything and carry out what we are told', he warned against 'involving ourselves in a position which might bring us head on against all other sections of the International'.

In his speech Dutt put forward quite a number of the ideas that he was to develop more boldly, and indeed aggressively, at the 2-3 October sessions. He believed that the German-Soviet non-aggression pact denoted 'a completely new situation'. The 2 September Manifesto had made a mistake in being 'orientated on the single factor of fascism, that is fascism as the supreme enemy', whilst 'leaving the other factor, the Soviet Union, out of the picture'. The Soviet Union was 'enormously strengthened', he said, and things were 'already advancing towards revolutionary possibilities'. There was 'parallel responsibility of both imperialist camps in this war', which was 'not for democracy against fascism'. In such an imperialist war, 'the main struggle of the working class is against its own imperialist government ... only a people's government can defend the people against fascism'. Such a government should seek a conference to secure a democratic peace based on self-determination. However he concluded cautiously that they should not endorse a new policy statement until they had 'established our contact with international comrades and reach our definite line'. Meanwhile they should 'only shift the emphasis a bit'.

Maurice Cornforth was particularly scathing about Dutt's approach which required that 'we now wait, while there is a war going on, for Comrade Springhall to come back from Moscow'. He put the question, 'what have we

got a Central Committee for, and if this is the way our leadership is working, how are we going to have a party with any authority in the country at all?' Very soon he was to be eating these words.

William Gallacher's reaction to Dutt was expressed in even more forceful terms and he did not subsequently take them back. 'I have never heard so much confusion in one speech as in Dutt's today', declared the party's one member of Parliament, 'and it is all based upon the hope that somehow the Soviet Union will sort out things for us'. Dutt had said that a people's government was required in order to lead a democratic war to defeat Hitler's fascism, 'but what is going to happen if in the meantime Hitler wipes us all out?'

J.R. Campbell, in a tough and closely argued speech, contended that the two main positions in the discussion were represented by those, like Pollitt and himself, who saw fascism making the second world war fundamentally different from the first, and 'those who are returning to the position of the Trotskyists in their criticism of the [Comintern's] Seventh World Congress, namely that fascism makes no difference and that the formulae of 1914 are valid guides for us'. He warned of the grim consequences of a military victory of fascist Germany over Britain and France, which he saw as a real possibility. If they stopped a German breakthrough, the French army would be defending bourgeois democracy and civilisation irrespective of the subjective motives of their imperialist leaders.

In the first day's session, preceding the arrival of Springhall, almost all the speakers expressed broad agreement with the 'struggle on two fronts' line. No-one denied the imperialist character and motives of the Chamberlain government, but practically everyone acknowledged the crucial distinction between fascism and bourgeois democracy, which made the war either actually or potentially a democratic war against fascism.<sup>36</sup>

Only William Rust disassociated himself and expressed a position similar to Dutt's. He deplored an allegedly 'growing tendency in our work and treatment to direct the fight against Hitler, not against Chamberlain'. He

criticised the *Daily Worker* for having, in this period of the 'phoney war', urged 'the military and technical intensification of the war' against Nazi Germany. Like Dutt, he argued that 'it is not just an issue of fascism versus democracy. It is an issue of the socialist world versus the capitalist world.' Germany had signed the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union 'because it was afraid of [its] power'. It was necessary to explain how Soviet interests were 'identical with the interests of the international working class'. On the question of peace proposals, he urged 'watching the situation with all its surprises and peculiarities' (he recalled 'the way we have been taken unawares') and keeping an 'open mind'. He too was waiting for Springhall – and the wait was to be a short one.

*Springhall's Message From Moscow: 25 September*

Springhall arrived from Moscow on the evening of that Sunday 24 September. In private notes written years later, Pollitt describes how he was snipping the hedge of his front garden when he noticed Springhall coming up the street.<sup>37</sup> The next morning members of the Central Committee listened intently to his brief report from Comintern headquarters, which their anguished questions sought to get him to amplify and explain (pp.58-61).<sup>38</sup> The basis of his report was the 'short thesis' from the Comintern Secretariat, which Dutt would subsequently read out to the Central Committee on 2 October (pp.69-70).

Springhall had not in fact brought a copy of the 'thesis' with him, and he interspersed his recollection of its content with what Dimitrov and André Marty told him before he left Moscow. This put the implications of the anti-war line more bluntly, not to say cynically. It would be seen 'not as a terrific misfortune if Poland were to disappear from the scene' and be absorbed by Nazi Germany, he related. It was necessary to work for Britain's military defeat without worrying about the prospect of fascism being imposed here as a result (p.61). No wonder that forty years later the London District Secretary of the time, Ted Bramley, would recall having been 'shattered' by Springhall's report.<sup>39</sup>



Springhall had not been allowed to attend the meeting of the Comintern Secretariat which adopted the new line and was unable to give adequate answers to the questions put to him by the Central Committee and subsequently by the Political Bureau. Pollitt could not remember ever having heard a report 'so bankrupt and devoid of explanation' (p.199).

No doubt remained that the British Party's line was totally at variance with that of the Comintern Secretariat, which was demanding that it be changed. The Central Committee adjourned, leaving the Political Bureau to carry on the discussion on the momentous points at issue, whilst Central Committee members were asked to refrain from informing their district committees of their unconcluded debates.

*The Adjournment: 26 September – 1 October*

After the 25 September session, as Pollitt would report to the resumed meeting on 2 October, he had handed over his general secretary's responsibility to a secretariat of three agreed to by the Political Bureau and comprising Dutt, Rust and Springhall. This was because he recognised that the Party was required to bring its policy into line with that of the Comintern. For years the International had been applying a thoroughly Stalinist version of democratic centralism. Neither its Executive Committee (with its four British members) which had not held a plenary meeting for four years, nor its Presidium (of which Pollitt was a full and Gallacher a candidate member) had been involved in determining the 180 degree turn now reported by Springhall. This was decided, or at least approved, by its Secretariat, whose seven members did not include a British Communist and who did not even consult Springhall as the CPGB's representative working in the same building.<sup>40</sup> A delegation from the British Party's Central Committee, which had been due to go to Moscow on the eve of the war and wanted a discussion there on what line to follow if war came, had been cancelled by the Comintern Secretariat (pp.208, 244). If the British Party was going to have to be brought round to accepting the Comintern Secretariat's new line, Pollitt preferred that responsibility for this should

be taken by the three members of the leadership who agreed with it. Meanwhile he would oppose politically a line with which he was in the strongest disagreement.<sup>41</sup>

The situation was further complicated by the news received on 29 September that a 'German-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and the Delimitation of Borders' had been negotiated in Moscow the previous day. Its public clauses (there were also 'secret additional protocols', of which no one in the CPGB leadership was in a position to know) defined a new frontier 'on the territory of the former Polish state' following the entry of German troops from the west on 1 September and Soviet troops from the east on 17 September. The latter took over the areas of Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine (conquered by the Poles in 1920), a move not expected but defended by Pollitt and the CPGB leadership. Along with the treaty, the two governments issued a joint 'Peace Appeal', which urged that Britain and France should make peace with Germany now that the USSR and Germany had 'finally settled by the treaty signed today the questions arising from the dissolution of the Polish state'.<sup>42</sup> There could hardly be much doubt that such a peace could only be on the basis of accepting German occupation in Poland and the 'disappearance from the scene', as Springhall had put it, of a Polish state.

The Political Bureau met to consider how it should react to this. It found itself divided between the 'three ruthless revolutionaries', as Gallacher was to call them (p.92), who constituted the new secretariat (Dutt, Rust and Springhall), and the other five members of the Political Bureau present (Pollitt, Gallacher, Campbell, Burns and Bramley). The result was a compromise statement, in which elements of the old and new lines coexisted uneasily. It was decided to issue it the name of the *Daily Worker* editorial board<sup>43</sup> rather than the Political Bureau. This was presumably due particularly to the objection of the Secretariat *troika* to its statement that 'the working class, while it will not allow itself to be led to the slaughter for imperialist aims, wants the defeat of Nazi aggression because of the very real threat it contains to working class freedom'.<sup>44</sup>

*Accepting the Turn: 2-3 October*

It was precisely such a stand that Dutt sought to challenge when he opened the resumed Central Committee meeting on Monday 2 October, one day earlier than planned. He based himself on a totally uncritical acceptance of everything in the Comintern Secretariat's 'short thesis', a copy of which had now at last been received, (it was not explained through what channels). If Gallacher's uninhibited reaction was that he had 'never at this Central Committee heard a more unscrupulous and dishonest speech', Dutt had the great advantage of speaking on behalf of the line of the Comintern, headed by Dimitrov, as expressed in the 'short thesis', and of the Soviet Union, headed by Stalin, as expressed in the German-Soviet Peace Appeal of 28 September. It was this that led Communist leaders like Ted Bramley, for whom Springhall's report had come as a 'bombshell', to convince themselves that the line in which they had strongly believed until then must be mistaken. In 1979 Bramley told a conference he had 'suppressed [his] doubts and voted for the change', adding that his 'respect for the International, led by Dimitrov, was enormous'.<sup>45</sup>

Hence the contrast between speeches made, often by the same people, on 24 September and on 2-3 October. Most striking in this respect are the two speeches of the 30-year-old Maurice Cornforth, Cambridge graduate and at that time the Party's Eastern Counties organiser. His September contribution, already referred to, argued as strongly as any the need to work for 'the military defeat of fascism'. Barely a week later we find him arguing for an 'immediate peace' and performing what he himself describes as a 'political somersault' (p.130). Cornforth explained without inhibition that this flowed from the need constantly to follow the Soviet Union. It may surprise those knowing Cornforth's later works, expounding and later critically reappraising Marxist philosophical materialism, to find him here as a self-confessed fideist. This was, he claimed because, 'I personally have got that sort of faith in the Soviet Union to be willing to do that, because I believe that if one loses anything of that faith in the Soviet Union one is done for as a Communist and Socialist' (p.131). That

a man with Cornforth's great ability and philosophical scholarship should have reasoned like this is revealing of the insidious power of Stalinist ideology in those years.

### *Assessing the Debate*

The transcript that we are now able to publish reveals that all the main arguments used by the two main sides in the controversies on this issue in the 1970s<sup>46</sup> had already been used in the Central Committee debates nearly four decades earlier. We are able to judge whose perspectives and predictions made in 1939 stand up best in the light of subsequent historical experience. This applies particularly to the character of German fascism and the prospects for revolution in Germany. Can anyone today doubt that Pollitt and Campbell were right when they emphasised the horrific nature of Nazism as compared with bourgeois democracy in Britain and France, notwithstanding the often brutal repression of colonial people in the latter's empires? Few would deny that they were correct in maintaining that Germany had emerged strengthened rather than weakened after the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and the German conquest of Poland. Surely Campbell was right that the latter was 'simply a step in the chain of Nazi aggression for the domination of Europe'. (p.117) Surely he was justified in pouring cold water on Dutt's prediction (based on a *Times* report from Amsterdam) of an impending Bolshevik revolution in Germany and in claiming that this revolution would be in danger of being crushed by British and French imperialism.

At a time when there had generally been among Communists an exaggerated view of the extent of anti-Nazi resistance in Germany, Campbell and Pollitt understood that Germany – 'a dictator country flushed with military victory' (Campbell p.106) – was the 'last country in Europe where you will see the revolution' (Pollitt p.205). What we are dealing with here is not the wisdom of hindsight, but views expressed at the time and borne out by history. Thus today German Communist historians recognise that 'through constant ideological pressure, clever demagoguery and brutal terror the Hitler

regime succeeded in suppressing the people's desire for peace and in driving them into war against their own interests'. The 'victory fanfares of the "special communiqués" drowned the consciences of the overwhelming majority of the German people'.<sup>47</sup> Despite heroic efforts by small groups of Communists and other anti-fascists, largely isolated from each other, the first months of the war showed that 'the fascist leadership was able to extend its influence, which made the anti-fascist struggle even more difficult'.<sup>48</sup>

### *Criticising Moscow*

Whilst regarding the non-aggression pact of 23 August as 'inevitable', Gorbachev has described the German-Soviet Friendship and Border Treaty following it on 28 September as 'politically mistaken with grave consequences ... for the Communist movement'.<sup>49</sup> A recent statement by the joint Soviet-Polish Historical Commission characterised the treaty as 'a serious violation of the norms of international law' and 'to all intents and purposes a whitewashing of fascism'.<sup>50</sup> *Izvestia* has written of the 'political cynicism and glaring immorality of Stalin's moves' at this time, when 'denunciation of fascism vanished from our press' and 'it began to carry articles condemning the British and French for their attempt to suppress by force the ideas of Hitlerism'.<sup>51</sup>

Pollitt and Campbell were generally the most consistent defenders of Soviet actions. They did not of course, seventeen years before Khrushchev's revelations at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, think of imputing immorality to Stalin to explain Soviet actions, which were now falsifying so many of their previous predictions and expectations. They did however have the clear-sightedness and courage to criticise some of the worst manifestations of this political cynicism, and were severely taken to task by Cornforth (p.131) and Whittaker (p.227) for so doing. Campbell was scathing about the incredible statements in the Soviet press which asserted that Poland, invaded by Nazi Germany, was responsible for starting the war (p.104).<sup>52</sup> His realistic appreciation that the Soviet Union's

actions were motivated by its own state interests horrified Dutt (p.80). Pollitt, recognising that his words would not be well received when the stenogram reached the Soviet Union, hit the nail on the head in criticising 'the disappearance of internationalism from the pronouncements that have been made from Moscow' (p.204). He also deplored the increasing tendency in articles in the Comintern's monthly journal, *The Communist International*, to use 'revolutionary language which had no meaning or content in the particular situation' (p.201).

Both Pollitt and Campbell made it clear that they were not criticising the non-aggression pact, which they saw as a justified Soviet diplomatic move to put off an attack for which the country was not yet adequately prepared. What they could not accept was the unwarranted political conclusions drawn from this for the international communist movement. They rejected the idea that such a pact meant that fascism had ceased to be 'the main enemy at which we direct our fire' (p.200), or that, in the shameful words of the Comintern Secretariat's thesis, 'the international working class may under no conditions defend fascist Poland' (p.69). Their approach was similar to that of Togliatti at the Comintern's Seventh World Congress. In his major report on the fight against war and fascism, the Italian Communist leader had specifically rejected the idea 'that at every given moment there must be a complete coincidence in all acts and on all questions between the tactics of the proletariat and communist parties that are still struggling for power and the concrete tactical measures of the Soviet proletariat and the CPSU which already have power in their hands'.<sup>53</sup>

Subsequently, on 9 February 1946, Stalin was to recognise in a speech that 'as distinct from the first world war, the second world war from the very outset assumed the nature of an anti-fascist war, a war of liberation, one of the tasks of which was to re-establish democratic liberties'.<sup>54</sup> For a long time Soviet historians have been of the opinion that 'for Poland, which had become the victim of fascist aggression, this war from the very start was a just, liberative, anti-fascist war'.<sup>55</sup> In the debates now underway

among them there seems to be a majority who explicitly criticise 'the Comintern's assessment of the second world war as imperialist on both sides, made in late 1939, [which] ignored the special danger posed by the fascist bloc, which aimed at enslaving the whole world, and disregarded the national liberation and anti-fascist tendencies that were gathering momentum'.<sup>56</sup> This was of course the main contention of Pollitt and Campbell, defending the line adopted by the CPGB before the Comintern's intervention. If accepted, it demolishes the underlying assumption of Dutt's subsequent reaction to the charge that the British Party's change in line had emanated from the Comintern: 'Of what use would be an International if its collective leadership did not represent a wider experience and wisdom than that of any section?'<sup>57</sup>

#### *The Central Committee Votes*

The most cogent arguments of Pollitt and Campbell could not prevail against a strongly ingrained tendency to 'blindly follow the International' as 'an unrivalled political authority and guide', as proudly proclaimed by Bill Cowe (p.275). Cowe told interviewers towards the end of his life that when Springhall arrived with the new line, 'I was criticising myself, why in the name of Christ, I, a Lenin School student, didn't recognise this myself'.<sup>58</sup> Some speakers not only rallied to the new line from Moscow but even went further than the 'short thesis'. Thus we find Hymie Lee, who on 24 September had argued strongly in support of the allied war against fascist Germany, now claiming that France was fascist and regarding it as 'a tremendous advantage' if British imperialism were to be defeated in the war (p.128). Jimmy Shields, extending Dutt's reference to the Soviet move into eastern Poland as the proof of rapidly advancing world revolution, argued in effect for the Soviet Union to export revolution more widely (p.268).

Only Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher voted on 3 October against the Comintern Secretariat's 'short thesis'. This had in addition been minimally adapted as a resolution to be reported to closed meetings of party organisations but not made public. Dutt was anxious to



prevent the public being informed too quickly of the extent of the turn (p.82).

On Pollitt's proposal Gallacher's vote against the thesis was recorded as being in favour.<sup>59</sup> Sixteen Central Committee members, along with five non-members who were attending, voted in favour (p.292). They included Gollan, Burns, Bramley and Kerrigan, whose contributions made it clear that they still had considerable reservations about crucial aspects of the new line. Pollitt was to note later that 'in a certain sense the vote of the Central Committee was misleading, because I had impressed upon many comrades their duty was to vote for the resolution in order to preserve the unity of the party'.<sup>60</sup>

### *Rationalising the Line*

The question is sometimes raised whether, even if the Comintern's anti-war line was mistaken, the British party was not right to follow it out of discipline and for the sake of international Communist unity. The transcript of the Central Committee discussions makes it clear that this was not how the issue was posed. In opening the resumed Central Committee on 2 October, Dutt made great play about not voting for 'the international line' as a matter of discipline but 'clearly, definitely on the basis of conviction' (p.86). For the Soviet Union and the international communist movement this was the period of high Stalinism, and the transcript shows Dutt officiating as its High Priest in the CPGB. 'The duty of a Communist is not to disagree but to accept', Dutt continued, proceeding to warn against 'dangerous tendencies existing in the party ... anti-Soviet tendencies ... talk of our being an independent party ... a reflection of enemy outlooks' (p.86). In his reply to the discussion he proclaimed: 'Comrades, a Communist has no private opinions. That is, he has no sanctum of private opinions that he is going to hold apart from the collective thinking of our movement' (p.285). So a disciplined subordination to the 'basic world line for all Parties' (p.284) whilst reserving one's opinion was not sufficient. What was demanded was 'a complete

unity and *conviction* of the line' rather than 'acceptance with reservations', which Dutt considered to be 'dangerous' (p.287, my emphasis.)

Most Central Committee members did succeed in convincing themselves of the correctness of the anti-war line for the reasons discussed above. Such reservations as there were on the part of a small number when the final vote came were rationalised in the course of arguing for the new line both in the party and publicly in the period ahead and in viewing the complex events unfolding through its prism. The publication in the *Daily Worker* of 4 November of an article opposing the war by Dimitrov, followed on 7 November by a statement in the name of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, contributed to the process. This was due more to the prestige of Dimitrov and the Comintern than to the cogency of their arguments.

By the time the next Central Committee met on 19 November, both Pollitt and Campbell, who had continued to work loyally for the party, had convinced themselves of the correctness of the new line. They submitted declarations repudiating their previous position and 'unreservedly accepting' (Pollitt) and declaring 'full agreement' (Campbell) with the new line. Subsequently both of them were to express the view that they had been correct in 1939 in seeing the war as anti-fascist in its essence.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Without the Comintern?*

There can be little reasonable doubt that the change in line in October 1939 was due to the intervention of the Comintern, with which all Communist Parties complied. The CPGB, to Dutt's concern, had done so with great reluctance. No other general secretary opposed the anti-war line as Pollitt did. That does not mean that if Springhall and the Comintern directive had not arrived, or even if the Comintern had been dissolved in, say, 1938 rather than in 1943, the line would not sooner or later have changed, though it would have been a slower and messier business. The kind of faith in the Soviet Union

exhibited by so many speakers in the discussion could have ensured that the Soviet line was followed even without a Communist International to transmit it. Already when the Soviet government had joined with the German government on 28 September in calling on Britain and France to make peace with Germany, members of the CPGB began to ask how the party could square its line with this. (Cornforth refers to this as even more important than Springhall's report in leading him to change his mind on the war (p.130).) Pressure would have built up further for a change of line when Stalin, on 30 November, blamed Britain and France for starting the war and for then refusing Germany's peace proposals<sup>62</sup> – a line which by that time was being widely propagated by the Soviet media.

There was no Communist International in June 1948 when the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), of which the CPGB was not even a member, criticised the Yugoslav Communist Party. Although until then Yugoslavia had for some time been praised as probably politically the most advanced of the 'People's Democracies' of Eastern Europe, the CPGB, like other Communist Parties, gave its full approval to the new line. The change was to come only after Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress in 1956, with the CPGB's Executive Committee stating that 'there is in future bound to be a more critical examination of policies, from whatever quarter they come'.<sup>63</sup> Subsequently the Party was to criticise the USSR for the military intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979, as well as for the measures it took against dissidents amongst its own citizens.

### *Political Personalities*

The transcript provides some fascinating insights into the political personalities of the four most important leaders of the British Communist Party over the first four to five decades of its history. Pollitt, Gallacher, Dutt and Campbell reveal here in heightened measure many of their characteristic traits. It will be a rich source for their future biographers.

Harry Pollitt's deep and sincere conviction of the

centrality of the struggle against fascism combined with a deeply human emotional identification with the latest victims of fascist aggression. 'I am ashamed of the lack of feeling ... that this struggle of the Polish people has aroused in our leadership', he tells the Central Committee, to whom he expresses his overriding concern to 'smash the fascist bastards once and for all' (p.203). Although he never thought he could prevent the implementation of the line from Comintern headquarters, his intellectual honesty compelled him to fight against a position which he was convinced was mistaken. With strong feeling, but great lucidity, he is moved to remark that he did not 'envy the comrades who can so lightly, in the space of a week and sometimes in the space of a day, go from one political conviction to another. I don't believe it augurs well for a leadership that can command the confidence of the party, the working class and the majority of the people' (p.200). The former boilermaker from Lancashire is full of resentment at Dutt's unjust and 'rotten implication' that he might be about to 'desert'. He retorts angrily 'Comrade Dutt, you won't intimidate me by that language. I was in the movement practically before you were born, and will be in the revolutionary movement a long time after some of you are forgotten' (pp.198-9).

Pollitt enjoyed not only the respect but, unlike Dutt, also the affection of his comrades and his leadership qualities were clear to everyone. Idris Cox was certainly not alone among those who at the time had come to accept Dutt's views as opposed to Pollitt's on the war, but who had 'more faith in Comrade Pollitt as a political leader' than in Dutt (p.248).<sup>64</sup>

William Gallacher's speeches are characterised by the honesty, critical-mindedness, pugnacity and impetuosity typical of this Clydeside workers' leader and Communist MP. 'All of us know Comrade Gallacher's temperament', says Pollitt, referring to the 'personal feelings' which he had displayed in the discussion. Gallacher not only considered that Dutt and Rust had performed an unprincipled *volte-face* politically, but was also deeply upset at the high-handed and uncomradely way in which he

considered that they had been acting, particularly in relation to Pollitt. Hence his use of such words as 'rotten', 'mean' and 'despicable' and his announcement that he 'cannot, under any circumstances, associate ... with these three people' (Dutt, Rust and Springhall) (p.296). We learn that as early as 1924 he had threatened not to go on the Central Executive Committee if Dutt was on it (p.199). On both occasions he was subsequently to calm down and to relent in the interests of party unity.

The Marxist historian Christopher Hill once remarked that for decades the hands of Rajani Palme Dutt's clock had been firmly fixed at five minutes to midnight. His speeches at the September-October Central Committee meeting paint the same picture of the 'advance of world revolution' proceeding apace as he did in 1928-9, when he was the main British ideologist of the Comintern's ultra-left turn. He could always produce a quotation from his excellent collection of cuttings from the capitalist press to back up even his most implausible predictions.

Dutt enjoyed great respect in the party for his intellectual ability, his championing of the cause of the peoples of India and the colonies, and for books like his *Fascism and Social Revolution* (1934). But on more than one occasion he had provoked resentment at the way in which he had taken on the task of 'pontifically'<sup>65</sup> shifting the British party on to a new Comintern line. Bramley mentions the speed with which Dutt had been the first to argue 'in a very unself-critical way' for the Comintern's instruction to change the CPGB line on conscription in May 1939 (p.241). Campbell's mocking description of him at the 2 October Central Committee session talking 'as if he was the school master sent to correct a class of unruly children' (p.102), does not seem too wide of the mark. Marian Jessop (later to become better known as Marian Ramelson), the one woman speaker in this male dominated discussion,<sup>66</sup> expressed a widespread resentment at Dutt's approach which she saw as one of 'either accept it or....' (p.261).

Replying to many criticisms concerned with the unpleasant tone of his opening statement on 2 October,

Dutt was characteristically impenitent, insisting that it 'is necessary to fight and to make no apologies for it, without kid gloves, without regard to friendship, [when] the issue of the international line is involved in the Party' (p.283). He had taken to heart the criticism made in 1929 by Comintern leader Dmitry Manuilsky who claimed the British Party was too much 'a society of great friends'.<sup>67</sup>

The speed with which Dutt could reverse his previous judgements of fundamental matters to fit in with the latest line from Moscow makes Gallacher's outburst at Dutt's 2 October speech as 'unscrupulous and opportunist' (p.91) quite understandable. It is certainly a dubious sort of Marxist analysis which, within barely a week of describing Hitler as 'the spearhead of international reaction',<sup>68</sup> proclaims that German fascism is now more and more clearly being replaced by British imperialism as 'the leader of world counter-revolution' (p.77).

J.R. Campbell is outstanding in the Central Committee debate in terms above all of the force, logic and wit with which he argues his case. Both in the 1928-9 debate (when he was opposed by Pollitt) and in 1939 (when they were allies) there could not have been a greater contrast between the realistic, down-to-earth assessments of this Scottish worker-intellectual and the revolutionary pipe dreams in which Dutt engaged in both these controversies, which have important elements in common. We find Campbell reproached with 'truculence' and 'obstinacy' for the robust way in which he argues his case and sticks to his guns on the war in the October 1939 debates. Sadly such 'obstinacy' did not prevent him and Pollitt seven weeks later from 'capitulating' and 'confessing' to having done harm to the party and having 'played into the hands of the class enemy' by persisting stubbornly in the 'wrong position'.<sup>69</sup> As leaders of the CPGB and the Communist International throughout the 1930s they could not but be marked by the Stalin period. Many years later Johnny Campbell told me: 'If you didn't live through that time you can't understand what the pressures were to convince ourselves that the line of the International and Soviet Union was right, as we had done previously over the Moscow Trials.'

*After the Central Committee*

At the end of the Central Committee a new Political Bureau was elected, from which Pollitt, Campbell and Burns were dropped. Dutt took over Pollitt's responsibilities as general secretary, though he never seems to have been publicly referred to as such. Rust took Campbell's place as editor of the *Daily Worker*.

The Central Committee meeting closed in the late afternoon or early evening of 3 October with the adoption of a statement carried in its name as the front page lead in the next morning's *Daily Worker*. Under the headline 'The Communist Aims for Peace', it declared: 'We are against the continuance of the war. We demand that negotiations be immediately opened for the establishment of peace'. The peoples of Britain and France would not 'sacrifice their lives to replace one fascist machine by another in western Poland'.

On 7 October the *Daily Worker* published a manifesto in the name of the Central Committee entitled *Peace or War?* It proclaimed that 'the immediate issue is the ending of hostilities and the calling of a peace conference'.<sup>70</sup> In accordance with this line, the front page of the paper that day carried the headline, 'Hitler Makes His Offer'. It commented editorially: 'From Hitler "emerges" the proposal for a peace conference. But Chamberlain and Daladier are demanding the continuation of war.' On 1 November a pamphlet by Dutt, entitled *Why This War?* developed the argument against the war and for a negotiated peace. It was published in 50,000 copies, as had been Pollitt's *How to Win the War*, which had now been withdrawn.

Meanwhile members of the Central Committee reported on the new line and urged support for it at District Committees and then at 'aggregates' attended by a high proportion of the membership. These meetings recorded overwhelming votes in support of the new Central Committee position. Dutt was later to claim '99 percent complete support'<sup>71</sup> – a figure that brings to mind pre-*perestroika* Soviet elections. The same factors operated here to secure a quick change of position as in

the Central Committee, but even more strongly, because the membership did not hear the opposing arguments advanced in the Central Committee discussions.

Pollitt was to recall two decades later that at the Central Committee meeting he 'was not happy to see comrades so quickly changing their previous opinions'.<sup>72</sup> For Ernie Trory, then Sussex County Organiser of the Party and now a leading member of the hardline New Communist Party, which split from the CPGB in 1977, such rapid reversals of opinion among the membership are a cause for exultation. 'It says something for our organisation', he writes, 'that within little more than 48 hours of my hearing of the change of policy, it had been thoroughly discussed and [apparently unanimously – MJ] accepted by an enlarged County Secretariat and four of our Sussex branches'. They were joined a few days later by three others, soon to be followed by most or all the rest.<sup>73</sup>

Although the anti-war line was to undergo various tactical shifts, it was not reversed until after the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941.<sup>74</sup> At an emergency Political Bureau meeting that mid-summer Sunday there was agreement on now supporting the war, but disagreement on the attitude to take towards the Churchill government. The majority, headed by Dutt, expressed 'no confidence in the present government, dominated by the Tory friends of fascism and coalition Labour leaders'. They urged its replacement by a 'People's Government which can be trusted to defend the interests of the people and maintain close alliance with the Soviet Union'.<sup>75</sup> Pollitt headed a minority in the Political Bureau, to which he had returned some time before, arguing for 'unconditional' support for the Churchill government, which had offered help to the Soviet Union. After 'strong criticism' from the Comintern of the majority line, this was quickly reversed in favour of working for 'the broadest united national front around the Churchill government'.<sup>76</sup> Dutt was entrusted with writing an article expounding the new line.<sup>77</sup> In July Harry Pollitt was reinstated as general secretary. The wheel had turned full circle.



*Destiny of a Document*

In the days of the Communist International (1919–43), Communist Parties were required to make stenographic records ('stenograms') of the meetings of their leading bodies and send them to Comintern headquarters in Moscow. After its dissolution its substantial archives were to be entrusted to the care of the Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow.

In 1979, the fortieth anniversary of the outbreak of war, the British Communist Party's History Group held a conference to debate the Party's 1939 change of line. Since apparently no copies of the stenogram had been retained in Britain, the Communist Party requested one from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. Although we were to receive some microfilm of earlier meetings, our attempts to obtain those of the wartime meetings, in which we were particularly interested, drew a blank. While preparing for the conference, I was fascinated to read in the 1943 War Cabinet Papers in the Public Record Office a report on the Communist Party which had been marked 'Top Secret'. Stating that minutes of the Central Committee meetings for the first months of the war had 'come into the hands of the investigating authorities', it carried what it claimed were quotations from speeches made at them. Since it was not possible at this time to obtain the stenogram from Moscow, it was decided when the proceedings of the conference were published to include the Cabinet document as an appendix.<sup>78</sup> The transcript now published validates the Central Committee quotations in that document. How the minutes from which they were drawn fell into the hands of British intelligence agents has still to be disclosed. It is ironic that while the stenogram was considered too confidential for party members outside the Central Committee (with very few exceptions) to see, MI5 and the Home Secretary were in a position to study it at their leisure!

At the 1979 conference Sam Russell revealed that, as *Daily Worker* correspondent working in Brussels in the early months of the war, he had been shown the September-October Central Committee stenogram by the

Comintern representative Evžen Fried (Clément). He knew that it had subsequently been transmitted by Fried to Comintern headquarters in Moscow, and he made a strong plea that 'this vital document' should be obtained from the Soviet Union.<sup>79</sup>

More favourable opportunities presented themselves for this with the big changes taking place under Gorbachev's leadership. In Moscow in October 1987 I received a sympathetic response from the new director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Georgi Smirnov, when I asked him on behalf of the CPGB that this and other Comintern documents should be made available. Other Communist Parties had been making similar requests, whilst in the Soviet Union itself the demand for access to archives received growing support. Subsequently we were informed of the very welcome Soviet decision to make its archives more accessible to the world's Communist parties, on whose behalf they are held, and to other researchers. Last year the CPGB received a large consignment of microfilm including the stenogram of the 2-3 October Central Committee sessions.

Over the last fifty years this document has passed from London, where MI5 somehow gained access to it, via Brussels to Moscow. After the German invasion in 1941 it was evacuated with the Comintern and its archives to the walled city of Ufa in Bashkiria. Then, towards the end of the war, it was brought back to the Soviet capital to remain under lock and key for the next 44 years until, with the onset of *glasnost*, it has now at last returned to the country of its origin to be made available to the British public. As Marx used to say; '*Habent et sua fata libelli*' (Books also have destinies of their own).

### Notes

1. Central Party Archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (Moscow), hereafter noted as CPA, stock 495, list 18, document 1292, pp. 47-8.
2. The French Communist Party was particularly badly shaken, with 21 out of its 72 parliamentary deputies and five out of its 55 Central

Committee members resigning from the party. Other leaders like Renaud Jean who opposed the anti-war line refused to abandon the party in the face of government repression. As late as 23 September one of the few Communist journals not yet banned – *Le Progrès* of Argenteuil – was publishing an editorial by the well-known Communist leader Gabriel Péri on 'How to Win the War'. On 26 September the French Communist Party was banned by the Daladier government.

3. Membership rose from 6,500 in February 1935 to 18,000 in August 1939 (N. Branson, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Lawrence and Wishart 1985, pp. 188, 271.)
4. G. Dimitrov, *The United Front*, Lawrence and Wishart 1938, pp. 109–10.
5. *ibid.*, p. 179.
6. Quoted by J. Mahon, *Harry Pollitt: A Biography*, Lawrence and Wishart 1976, p. 242.
7. *Daily Worker*, 23 August 1939.
8. *ibid.*, 30 August 1939.
9. The manifesto is published in full as an appendix in J Attfield and S Williams (eds), *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and the War*, Lawrence & Wishart 1984, pp. 147–152. Hereafter referred to as *1939*.
10. See, especially, *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1939.
11. H. Pollitt, *How to Win the War*, CPGB 1939, p. 6.
12. *ibid.*, p. 4.
13. It was normal practice for Comintern bodies to make transcripts of their meetings. The 'stenograms' of such meetings held in other periods are preserved in the CPA.
14. CPA, stock 495, list 18, document 1291, pp. 141–42.
15. *The Communist International*, September 1939, Vol. XVII, No. 9, pp. 969, 1001.
16. CPA, stock 495, list 18, document 1292, pp. 8–9.
17. This was referred to by CPSU secretary Aleksandr Yakovlev in an interview on the 1939 events in *Pravda* on 18 August 1989. Yakovlev gave a brief quotation from Stalin, as recorded by Dimitrov: 'We should have preferred an agreement with the so-called democratic countries and we conducted talks to this end, but Britain and France wanted to have us acting as their servants and not even paying us for it'.
18. K. Shirinya, *The Time of Hard Decisions (On the Soviet-German Pact, the Beginning of World War II and the Comintern Policy)*, 31 July 1989, distributed by Novosti Press Agency. As far as I know this article has not appeared in any journal. However in *7 Days* of 7 October 1989 Sam Russell gave a valuable summary of Shirinya's 'remarkable new study'.
19. CPA, *op cit*, pp. 47–48. This meeting was attended by Dimitrov, Gottwald, Kuusinen, Marty, Pieck, Diaz, and Florin, as well as Kolarov (from Bulgaria), who was a member of the ECCI

- Presidium but not of the Secretariat. All but Kuusinen and Kolarov spoke in the discussion.
20. H. Kühnrich, Report to the Scientific Conference, 'Terror-Demagogy-Aggression-Resistance', in *Buchenwald-Hefte*, 6 June 1989, cited by W.R. Garscha in *Weg und Ziel* (Vienna), No. 10, October 1989, pp. 424, 426. There is no trace of such a communication in the relevant Comintern Secretariat file in Moscow. I have written to Professor Kühnrich requesting details of the content and source of this reported objection.
  21. CPA *loc cit*. This paragraph is also included in a German translation of the directives wired to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and curiously dated 8 September 1939. ('Messages Between Prague and Moscow 1939-1941', *Príspevky k dejinám KSČ* 1967, No. 3, pp. 389-90.)
  22. K. Shirinya, *op cit*, p. 6.
  23. See Stalin's Reuters interview on the dissolution of the Comintern (28 May 1943), in J. Degras (ed), *The Communist International 1919-43, Documents*, Frank Cass 1971, Vol. 3, pp. 476-7.
  24. *Daily Worker*, 8 May 1940.
  25. *Pravda*, 7 April 1989. cf the rejection by *Neues Deutschland* (GDR), 6/7 May 1989, of this characterisation of the Comintern's position during this period.
  26. E. Browder, *The Second Imperialist War*, International Publishers 1940, p. 105.
  27. Interview in the *Daily Worker*, 13 September 1939, reproduced in Browder, *op cit*, pp. 115-6. On 19 September the National Committee of the CPUSA adopted a resolution characterising the war in the same way. (*The Communist*, October 1939, pp. 899-904.)
  28. Harry Pollitt's Notes, 5 August 1959 on 1939-41, p. 8, (CPGB archives), hereafter HPN.
  29. P.J. Jaffe, 'The Rise and Fall of Earl Browder', *Survey* Spring 1972, Vol. 18, No. 2 (83), p. 30.
  30. Boris Ponomaryov, a Comintern official at the time, recalls such 'deeply conspiratorial' radio links for transmitting directives in the war in *idem*, 'Die Kommunistische Internationale - Bestandteil der grossen Vergangenheit unserer Bewegung', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (GDR), 3/1989, p. 302.
  31. 'Il faut faire la Paix' (21 September 1939) in *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut de Recherches Marxistes* 1983, No. 14 spécial, p.133. This statement marked the beginning of a transition to a harder line anti-war position. That was expressed in the Appeal of the French Communist Party to the people of France, dated the first fortnight of October 1939. It proclaimed that 'the enemy is at home and it is in France that the French working people should fight fascism'. (Reproduced in *Recherches et Débats*, No. 3, 'Le Tournant de 39', supplement to Nos 29/30 of *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, n.d., p. 42.)
  32. Thorez's notes are reproduced in full in *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut*

- de Recherches Marxistes*, *op cit*, pp. 119–30. For him the 'decisive question' was 'loyalty to SU (Soviet Union), to CI (Communist International), to Stalin', p. 21.
33. The conference fixed for 24/25 September and postponed on 18 September was in fact never to take place.
  34. The telegram is among the Pollitt papers in the CPGB archive.
  35. In a *Sunday Times* magazine interview on 30 August 1970, Dutt recalled: 'By 15 September, it was clear that the genuinely anti-fascist feeling of the people was being misused and I said (in the Political Bureau) we should have to revise our line.' Neither there, nor in a similar account which he gave in *Labour Monthly*, April 1971, pp. 183–4, did Dutt mention the arrival of the Moscow telegram the previous day!
  36. In addition to Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher, this view was expressed in the speeches of Arthur Horner, Idris Cox, Maurice Cornforth, Finlay Hart, Peter Kerrigan, Hymie Lee and Emile Burns.
  37. HPN, p. 8.
  38. The 'stenogram' of this session was for some reason not sent to Moscow. A note from the British Party to the Comintern indicated that it had been 'kept in our Secretariat'. It has recently been found among Harry Pollitt's papers.
  39. 1939, p. 85.
  40. Raymond Guyot of the French Communist Party, although a candidate member of the Comintern Presidium, was apparently treated in the same way. (See his interview in *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, No. 5, October/November 1973, pp. 68–69.)
  41. He felt obliged subsequently to abjure this as having constituted an 'impermissible infraction' of discipline, see 1939, p. 168.
  42. J. Degras (ed), *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 1917–1941*, Vol. III, Oxford University Press 1955, pp. 377–80. The 28 September secret protocols were recognised and criticised in a joint statement by Soviet and Polish historians in *Pravda*, 25 May 1989.
  43. It was not until June 1940 that a public editorial board was set up, including non-members of the Communist Party, see N. Branson *op cit*, pp. 291–92.
  44. *Daily Worker*, 30 September 1939.
  45. 1939, p. 85. He went on to explain why, in retrospect, he believed that the change in line was a mistake (See 1939 pp. 91–94.)
  46. Particularly at the 1979 Conference (see 1939) and in the debate between Andrew Rothstein and myself conducted from 1976–8 in the *Bulletin* (now *Labour History Review*) of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 33–37.
  47. *Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, Dietz (GDR) 1966, Vol. 5, pp. 249–50.
  48. H. Kühnrich, 'Einige Fragen des Kampfes der KPD in der Ersten Periode des Zweiten Weltkrieges', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, (GDR), I/1982, p. 27.

49. M. Gorbachev's postscript to *Intelligentsia pered litsom novykh problem sotsializma*, Politizdat 1988, pp. 74–5.
50. *Pravda*, 25 May 1989.
51. A Chubaryan, *Izvestia*, 1 July 1989. cf. *Izvestia's* leading article of 9 October 1939, reprinted in *World News and Views*, 14 October 1939: 'No ideology, no world outlook, can be destroyed by fire and sword. One can respect or hate Hitlerism like any other system of political views. This is a matter of taste. But to start war because of the "Destruction of Hitlerism" means committing criminal stupidity in politics.' See also Molotov's speech on 31 October 1939, V Molotov, *Soviet Peace Policy*, Lawrence and Wishart 1941, p. 29: 'One may accept or reject Hitlerism as well as any other ideological system, that is a matter of political views'.
52. cf. *The Communist International*, October 1939, p. 1077: 'The Polish bourgeoisie which unleashed this war ...'
53. Ercoli, 'The Fight Against War and Fascism' in the *Report of the Seventh World Congress*, Modern Books 1936, p. 45.
54. Quoted by J. Mahon, *op cit*, p. 471. cf. Dutt's tortuous attempt to adjust to this in *Labour Monthly*, April 1946, p. 98ff.
55. *Outline History of the Communist International*, Progress Publishers 1971, p. 457. (Dutt is listed as one of those with whose collaboration the volume was prepared.)
56. F. Firsov, 'What the Comintern's Archives will Reveal', *World Marxist Review*, January 1989, p. 57.
57. R. Palme Dutt, 'Why Communist Policy Changed', *Daily Worker* 8 May 1940.
58. Willie Thompson and Sandy Hobbs, 'British Communists on the War, 1939–41', *Oral History*, Autumn 1988, vol. 16, No. 2, p. 27.
59. This would appear to have been motivated by Pollitt's concern not to complicate the public position of the party's one representative in parliament, as well as to ensure Gallacher's re-election to the party's Political Bureau, on which Pollitt hoped he would exercise some influence.
60. HPN, p. 9.
61. The declarations are published in 1939, pp. 167–8, Pollitt's published declaration, dated 18 November, had been preceded by a considerably briefer one, dated 12 November, which did not plead guilty to 'an impermissible infraction of our Party discipline' in 'resisting the carrying out of the line of the Communist Party and the Communist International' as the later statement did. Presumably his 12 November draft was deemed inadequately self-critical, and therefore unacceptable to Dutt and the Secretariat. This earlier statement is in the CPGB archive among the Dutt Papers, along with a signed copy of his 18 November declaration. On the latter Dutt has made one change, in his unmistakable handwriting, which was incorporated in the published declaration: Pollitt's reference to 'doubts about the policy of revolutionary defeatism' in a war against German fascism is amended to 'doubts

about our traditional policy' ... Pollitt, in an ITV interview on 30 April 1956, said: 'In 1939 I thought it an anti-fascist war. I thought it then and I think it now.' (Quoted by J. Mahon, *op cit*, pp. 253-4.) Johnny Campbell expressed a similar view to me, as to other comrades.

62. *World News and Views*, 9 December 1939, p. 1126.
63. *World News*, 19 May 1956, p. 316.
64. In 1979 Cox stated however that it had been 'a political blunder to succumb to the pressure of the Comintern to change (the 2 September) line', see *1939*, p. 98.
65. The term was used by former London District Secretary of the CPGB, Ernie Cant, in a characterisation of Dutt as a man out of touch with the masses and with party life who 'knows only resolutions, theses, ballot results, newspaper cuttings'. (Quoted by L.J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party*, Macgibbon and Kee 1966, p. 237.)
66. The only other woman on the Central Committee of 24 was Mavis Llewellyn, who was not present.
67. Quoted by N. Branson, *op cit*, pp. 45-6. Manuilsky suggested that when the British have their revolution, 'it will perhaps be necessary to chop some heads off!'
68. R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, October 1939, p. 593.
69. *1939*, pp. 167-8.
70. The manifesto is reproduced in *1939*, pp. 169-74.
71. R.P. Dutt, *Leninism*, Marx House 1941, p. 4.
72. HPN, p. 9.
73. E. Trory, *Imperialist War*, Crabtree Press 1977, p. 46.
74. See *1939*, pp. 28-40, 89-91, 98-9, 128-9. The demand for a peace conference had more or less disappeared by the end of 1939. Immediately following the fall of France to Hitler the Political Bureau of the CPGB issued an 'Urgent Call to the People' referring to 'the danger of fascist invasion and tyranny'. It called for 'a new People's Government' as 'the only way for the people to preserve their independence and democratic institutions', and save themselves from 'the appalling catastrophe that has befallen the French people'. (*World News and Views*, 29 June 1940, p. 360.) This represented an implicit return, albeit short-lived, to the recognition of the importance of the distinction between fascist and democratic states.
75. *World News and Views*, 28 June 1941, pp. 401-2.
76. HPN, pp. 17-18.
77. This he did in the issue of *World News and Views*, 19 July 1941, reversing the position for which he had argued in the same journal two weeks previously. No reference was made to the earlier article, nor, of course, to the intervention of the Comintern in the intervening fortnight.
78. *1939*, pp. 160-8.
79. *ibid*, pp. 116-9.

Central Committee  
Meeting

25 September 1939



## *Morning Session – Report from D.F. Springhall.*

**Springhall** – In my speech I want to give the essence of two conversations with Comrade Dimitrov and Comrade Marty and also the essence of a telegram which was sent out to the sections on the 10th, but which whilst it reached other Parties, apparently has not reached us, although it is possible we may be able to get this during the course of the meeting.

The meeting of the Communist International Secretariat on the 9th and 10th finally drew up what was called a short thesis, which was sent out in telegraphic form. Following that a small commission was appointed to further work on the thing and, with the aid of comrades from the various countries, it has the aim of drawing up a bigger thesis which will try to concretise the directives for the various countries. This will be sent to the Parties, not in the form of a manifesto for publication, but for the use of Parties.

This short thesis begins by saying that it is necessary to characterise the war not as a just war, but as an out-and-out imperialist war, a war which the working class in no countries can give any support to. It then proceeds to analyse the various aims of the belligerent powers stating that Germany's aims are very clearly those of European and world domination. With regard to Poland, the situation here is characterised by saying that Poland is a semi-fascist country which, whilst it has no colonies, has imperialist tendencies, that the evidence of this is the brutal manner of the oppression by the Polish ruling class of national minorities, their reactionary policy toward the

working-class movement in Poland and the manner in which they quickly jumped in to share in the carve-up of Czechoslovakia. It was further stated that it would be regarded not as a terrific misfortune if Poland were to disappear from the scene. It would mean one fascist state the less with it becoming part of a bigger fascist state. Therefore it was not a question of Polish independence, although Chamberlain who had refused the Soviet Pact was trying to use this as a reason for the war, in the course of his anti-fascist demagogy. Therefore in no manner whatsoever was any comparison possible with the situation of Czechoslovakia or Spain, which were genuine examples of the fight for independence. Further in this respect, Great Britain and Chamberlain were not genuinely concerned with Polish independence as was shown by the whole course of policy in relation to the Soviet Pact and their refusal to accept the assistance of the Red Army. Therefore the war is seen as a war of two imperialist groups with conflicting imperialist aims. From the side of Britain, it has the aim of preserving its imperialist interests and European domination against Germany, its chief rival.

Then particular emphasis was laid, particularly in conversations with Dimitrov, upon the fact that this whole situation opens up an entirely new situation. He referred to it as a completely new era, and although in general the parties had not drawn all the necessary conclusions from the signing of the Soviet-German Pact, it was now necessary to see that the differentiation between the fascist and so-called democratic countries had lost its former significance. A further important factor in drawing conclusions was the fact that Social Democracy almost everywhere was to be seen trailing at the tail of the home bourgeoisie.

In speaking about the quite new situation and the new era opened up by the war situation, the telegram and the conversations with Dimitrov laid particular stress upon the new perspectives which this placed before the working class and the Communist Parties, and it is put in the following manner: now the working class and Communist Parties have to act in such a way as will lead to the

shattering of the capitalist system everywhere. Whereas formerly the working class and Communist Parties fought to preserve peace, now that the imperialist conflicts had led to open war, the working class in the various countries must everywhere fight against war and, as Dimitrov expressed it, act as grave-diggers at the funeral of capitalism.

It then goes on to stress that the Communists must now take up the fight against war by beginning to unmask its imperialist character and in this respect states that where the Communist Parties have Communist M.P.'s they must vote against the war credits. Further the task is underlined of the need for the Communist Parties taking up what was called a strongly offensive line against social democracy.

In the second talk I had with Comrade Dimitrov he was trying to find a slogan form for this, and used the expression that in England we should consider something on the lines of 'No unity with the Chamberlain Socialists', but should do everything to prepare the way for the organisation of mass action against Chamberlain and the Labour leaders who were giving him their unqualified support. He stressed that in beginning this task of unmasking the imperialist character of the war we would have to proceed cautiously at the beginning, not jumping in and speaking of turning imperialist war into civil war etc. At this stage we had to limit ourselves to the task of explaining patiently and unmasking the imperialist essence of the war and we could not go beyond that in the first stage. The developing situation had to be watched very carefully, which would probably make necessary new slogans as the situation progressed.

Then for the neutral countries there is a paragraph in the short thesis which speaks about the task of fighting against those elements in those countries which while wanting neutrality for their own country would be likely, like America, to be ready to give support to other powers engaged in warlike action or who would be willing, whilst taking a neutral stand themselves, to see and even encourage other neutral countries to be drawn into the conflict.

Then there was a paragraph in the thesis which says that therefore the Communist Parties of France, Britain, America and Belgium which up till now had another line, must now begin to change their tactics in order to take up this line.

Then there is an explanatory point about the need for the Communist Parties to bear in mind in all their work an acute awareness of the difference in the situation between the working class and Communist Party in the country where they have power, in the Soviet Union, and the working class and Communist Parties in the capitalist countries. They should understand that the Communist Party in the Soviet Union has to carry out complicated manoeuvres. In this respect Dimitrov spoke about the photos of Stalin and Ribbentrop shaking hands and went on to emphasise that the Soviet Union at all times in its policy was serving the interests of both the Soviet people and those of the international working class, which of course had basically the same interests.

In the talks with Dimitrov particularly he laid stress upon the front-rank position and very big responsibilities in the situation of the British working class and Communist Party. If before the war in the fight for the preservation of peace, Great Britain occupied a first rank position, now that position was enormously increased. He emphasised that the British working class had to recognise that its position was being won by other countries, and the Party in remembering this should strive to set an example to the other countries in its attitude.

He also spoke with reference to this theme of a quite new situation in which we consciously placed before ourselves doing everything to undermine and shatter the foundations of the capitalist system everywhere. The British Party had to have a particular eye to the situation in the colonial countries, and in the situation developing to try and devise other means of rendering them assistance to free themselves finally from British imperialism. At the same time Comrade Dimitrov spoke very strongly against the news that had come through about the proposal to form the Czech legion and about the efforts of the

returned members of the Canadian International Brigade who had taken up the standpoint of placing their services at the disposal of the Canadian Government, and of tendencies for this everywhere. He expressed himself as strongly against this saying even that not a single Communist should go willingly to the war, although of course we should take the attitude of going when called upon, and being against any line of refusal to go or any attitude of that character.

He laid stress upon the difficulties which the application of such a line would bring, particularly for the French and British Parties, but urged the Party to take up this course with all energy and with its full resources, at the same time taking care that all necessary precautionary measures are taken to preserve the Party and Party leadership. The Party would have to be prepared to face serious repercussions, and possible illegality and special measures should be taken to preserve the leadership, with a reserve leadership and preservation of the cadres, at the same time hastening the development of the cadres' policy and bringing forward in a more widespread manner and more rapidly newer comrades into the leadership of the Party generally.

Finally, emphasis was laid upon the fact that this course was fully in line with what was written in the History of the CPSU about the 'just' and 'unjust' wars and about the character of the second imperialist war, of which this was seen as a wide extension.

A final point which emerged was that it was felt that to a degree the British Party in common with others, whilst it had reacted very quickly and in general correctly on the signing of the German-Soviet Pact, had nevertheless tended to pre-judge the issue before the war took place. This was seen by the suggested outline of Comrade Pollitt's report to the Congress where there was reference to what should be our attitude if there was no Pact, and which went on to speak about our proposals for winning the war.

That comprises the essence of the short telegram which was sent out and the two conversations which I had with Comrade Dimitrov before leaving. Comrade Dimitrov

proposed that we should immediately discuss these proposals and adopt this course, and begin to make the change in the line as quickly as possible, placing again the emphasis upon the care with which we should begin to do this and not advancing any other slogans at this stage but to try to concentrate everything upon making clear the imperialist essence of the war, which it was felt had not been done in the standpoint adopted hitherto and in the manifesto of September 2nd.

*Questions and Discussion Followed*

**Gallacher** – I want to ask every comrade here to shut out of his mind as if it had never been heard that reference to ‘Chamberlain Socialists’. The question is: Was it simply a conversation in which Comrade Dimitrov did all the talking or was there any representation made as to the position of the Party and the working class here?

**Springhall** – What happened was that although early on I asked for an opportunity of discussion, I was ill for a number of days and was sent away to the hospital, then afterwards there was a closed session of the Secretariat which worked out this short thesis which was immediately telegraphed to the Parties. The Secretariat and Dimitrov personally were in receipt of every telegram and of every lead that was contained in the newspapers of the various Parties which were immediately translated and sent to the Secretariat. But in the two discussions I spoke about the line of the Central Committee manifesto and the standpoint that had been taken hitherto by the Party. He was fully aware of that, and expressed himself as against this line, that it was a mistake, and then asked my opinions as to how his line would be received here. I said that I thought there would be difficulties in the matter. It would not be easy because of the extremely rapid and wholehearted way in which the Party had reacted along these lines, the character of Comrade Pollitt’s speeches and the whole line of the *Daily Worker*, but that I thought that following discussion that there would be found support for the line which was taken up by the Communist International.

**Kerrigan** – I want to ask if Comrade Springhall can give us a little more in detail the arguments and reasons for this formulation about there being no essential difference between the fascist states and the so-called democratic countries.

**Springhall** – Principally the whole estimation of the line of the British ruling class as expressed through Chamberlain's conduct during the several months of the Soviet Pact negotiations, and of the manner in which these terminated, showing that they were not prepared to enter into a Pact and to make the necessary agreement for the immediate military assistance of the Red Army. Dimitrov also drew attention to the fact that all along they had been making references in dealing with the democratic countries to the so-called democratic countries. They have seen this tendency developing, and now this differentiation was losing its former significance in this respect. For the Soviet Union, when it came to the final point they had to take the standpoint that for them there was little to choose between Hitler and Chamberlain.

**Kerrigan** – Did you raise any points or any discussion on the question of the actual situation of the working classes in the two countries? In the so-called democratic states and in the Fascist states the question of the liberties, trade union organisation, political parties, have been brought up and used very strongly by us in the course of our fight for the linking up of the Soviet Union with these countries.

**Springhall** – This was spoken about and the attitude taken there was that in this situation we had to be prepared for the Chamberlain Government, in carrying through its policy, to take the most severe repressive measures and to attempt to take away these democratic rights from the people and the Labour movement. We had to be prepared for this action to be taken along a wide front.

**Campbell** – I do not get the point. There was a small Commission which met on the 10th and 11th which drew

up this thesis. It is not quite clear whether Comrade Springhall was too ill to attend, or was available and was not allowed to attend.

**Springhall** – The meeting was on the 9th and 10th and then there were conversations with Dimitrov and Marty, conversations with all the other comrades from the various countries in Moscow, after this thesis had been adopted. Each comrade was asked to express himself and write some statement that would go to the Commission and be helpful to them in the drawing up of the final document. When I left the Commission had not started its work. It was only taking in the material and having conversations with the comrades. There was some delay in this and thus it was decided that I should immediately return without a moment's delay and that the thesis would be brought as quickly as possible by a comrade.

**Campbell** – I am still unclear. Were you physically available to take part in the meeting or small Commission, or did it meet and then give you a draft?

**Springhall** – Yes, it was a small closed meeting. I would have asked early on to go into any discussion which was organised, but in the final outcome it was a closed meeting of the Secretariat confined to the actual Secretariat members with the proposal to have a wider meeting at a later stage.

**Campbell** – What had the American Party been asked to do in regard to the neutrality business?

**Springhall** – The American Party had been asked to make a full campaign for full neutrality.

**Kerrigan** – I am not clear on the question of the differentiation. As I understand it our line is that although we don't introduce it at the present moment, it is to treat this as an imperialist war in the fullest sense. That is of course to work not only against our own bourgeoisie but for their military defeat.



**Springhall** – Yes, that is correct.

**Kerrigan** – Was consideration given then to the question of the possible effects of the defeat of the British imperialism, a military defeat, as to the actual system that might be brought in in this country?

**Springhall** – No.

**Kerrigan** – That is to say the possibility of fascism being imposed in this country from within and without.

**Springhall** – I raised this question, but there was a reluctance to go further at this stage. I pressed him to give more explanations at this point but it seemed to me that at that stage he limited himself to the first stage of our work, unmasking the imperialist character of the war and being guided by subsequent events with regard to what further slogans were adopted.

**Gollan** – But immediately we should abandon the slogan of war on two fronts and only have the war on one front?

**Springhall** – Yes.

**Campbell** – What about the Canadian Party?

**Springhall** – Basically the same line as ours. Their line was the same as ours.

**Pollitt** – I propose an adjournment to have a meeting of the Political Bureau.

*Agreed.*

## *Resumed Session – Harry Pollitt*

**Pollitt** – It must be clear to all members of the C.C., especially bearing in mind the character of the discussion yesterday and the character of Comrade Springhall's report today, that there is now need on the part of all of us for the most careful and serious thinking out of the whole position. We just want you to take note to see if you have the following points absolutely clear so far as the report of Comrade Springhall was concerned.

(1) That the present war is not a just war, it is an out-and-out imperialist war. Germany's aims are clear, they are for European and world domination.

(2) In regard to Poland, it is a semi-fascist state, or was, with imperialist tendencies, which has carried out suppression of national minorities and revolutionary movements. And here, attention was drawn to the way Poland jumped in and carved up Czechoslovakia.

(3) It is not regarded as a great misfortune if Poland were destroyed. It would mean one smaller fascist country swallowed up by a bigger fascist country.

(4) Therefore it is not a question of defence of Polish independence although Chamberlain trying to make this a reason and using anti-fascist demagogy.

(5) No comparison can be made between Czechoslovakia and Spain and the situation in Poland. The refusal of Soviet help and Chamberlain's influence, coupled with the previous characterisation of the semi-fascist character of Poland and its attitude towards minorities and the revolutionary movement, shows that it is not genuinely interested in the struggle for Polish independence.

(6) It is a war of two contending imperialist powers for

world domination with Britain having the aim of preserving European hegemony against its great rival Germany. It is a predatory robber war that not a single worker in any country can support.

(7) The distinction between the fascists and so-called democratic countries has now lost a lot of its former significance.

(8) The social democrats everywhere are taking the line of trailing behind their bourgeoisie.

(9) Communist Parties fight everywhere against the war and must commence an aggressive fight against the social democrats. No unity with the Socialist leaders. On the contrary the widest mass action against Chamberlain's policy and the policy of social democracy.

(10) We now face an entirely new world situation opened up by the war. A new era in which the working class and Communist Parties put before themselves the aim of shattering capitalism everywhere. The working class and the Communist Parties fought for peace. But now the imperialists have brought war. And now it is here, the workers fight to end war and make a funeral of capitalism.

(11) In neutral countries the Communist Parties must make a fight against elements who want neutrality for their own country but who, like America, assist other countries and would like to see other neutral countries drawn into the war.

(12) The Communist Parties of France, Britain, Belgium and America up to now have had a different line. They must now change their tactics in order to carry out the new line.

(13) Where the Communist Party has Members of Parliament they vote against war credits.

(14) To remember the difference between countries where the workers have power and the situation where the capitalists are in power. And to remember in the capitalist countries the need to understand that where the Communist Party has state power it has to carry out many manoeuvres. One point in connection with that, the idea being that there might be a little discussion as to Stalin

shaking hands with Ribbentrop. But the real thing is to understand the Soviet Army shaking hands with the Polish peasants. And that the first is a manoeuvre rendered necessary by the situation and the other is the real tactic.

The Political Bureau recommend that the Central Committee is adjourned until October 3rd when there will be the final decision on Comrade Springhall's report. The Political Bureau asks the members of the Central Committee not to discuss the points which have been given here with the District Committees until the Central Committee itself has made its final decision. If before the meeting the written thesis comes to hand, then we will find ways and means of seeing that the comrades get this as quickly as possible for further consideration.

One or two comrades are here in place of other comrades. In view of the character of the discussion, I am for the comrades coming again to the next meeting, but to take steps to see that the comrades whose place they are taking also come. Comrade Cox should explain the situation to Comrades Horner and Paynter who had to leave, and the indispensable necessity of these comrades being present. I would like endorsement for a personal proposal in regard to Comrade Tom Mann, I would like responsibility to give him the OK not to come.

*Endorsed.*

*Central Committee remains in session.*

Central Committee  
Meeting  
2 October 1939

## *Rajani Palme Dutt*

This meeting of the Central Committee has been called two days earlier than was originally fixed by reason of events whose urgency will be obvious to every one. It is not necessary to state that we are going to take today the most serious decision in the history of the Party and that every member of the Central Committee will be casting the most fateful vote that any one of the Central Committee will cast in the whole period of their membership.

We have delayed this decision for one week in order to give time for every member to consider his position. We knew that in doing that we were taking an extreme risk for the Party. Because of the likelihood that events would happen in between, events for which the old line would be inadequate and we were not prepared with a new line. That in fact has happened. The delay has cost us extremely dear.

During this period, one week, the Political Bureau appointed a Secretariat consisting of comrades Springhall, Rust and myself, to carry on. At the same time we have carried on while the old line was still the operative line of the Party, the new line not adopted and the Political Bureau still on the basis of the majority of supporters of the old line. And the result is that in face of the new situation represented by the peace proposals which came out on Friday,<sup>1</sup> we have had, and we have to register, an impotence of leadership of the Party. The character of a statement appearing on that Saturday's *Daily Worker* is a disaster for the Party.<sup>2</sup>

There is a humiliation, a complete incoherence worse either than the old line or the new. The old line would at least have been consistent, the new line would have been

able to face the situation. What we had was an incoherence as of someone who is afraid to think, to face the issues, afraid to reach a result, and we have to record that in regard to this the Secretariat places on record in its minutes that this statement was adopted against the wishes of the Secretariat. This was adopted by the Political Bureau, or majority on the Political Bureau, against the votes of the Secretariat.

**Burns** – (interjection) There was no vote put to the meeting.

**Dutt** – The vote that was taken on the first trial and vote showed a vote of five to three (the three representing the Secretariat), against the wishes of the Secretariat, and it was by reason of that that the Secretariat registered this minute after the adoption of that statement. We did this seriously because we consider that that statement was a disaster for the Party, that in this historic moment of this lead, and what it meant for the international movement, our Party should feel unresponding and playing its part. What we are determined is that this position must end.

We must and shall reach clearness and effectiveness of the line today. We have given time because we don't want a mechanical vote of acceptance on grounds of discipline while all the feelings and all the convictions are elsewhere. We want acceptance of this line by the members of the Central Committee on the basis of conviction. Absolute and complete conviction, because on that and only on that basis will this line which is going to make enormous demands on all of us be fought through and be really effectively carried through.

Since our meeting a week ago we have received the short thesis to which Comrade Springhall referred. I am going to read it to you first exactly in the form of the short thesis as received. We are not circulating this but this will be the basis of the resolution on which we are going to vote as a Central Committee. We shall adopt it naturally as a

Central Committee resolution, but entirely on the basis of the short thesis, so that there is no confusion that that is the ground on which we stand.

I shall therefore first read it straight through to you and then you will have the opportunity to take it down in terms as the Central Committee resolution because we don't propose to make a document of this but we do propose to make an internal resolution of the Central Committee which will have to be made known to every District Committee, to every organisation of the Party. Right through the Party this line has to be made clear and we have to see that our forces are launched on the basis of this line.

The present war is an imperialist and unjust war for which the bourgeoisie of all the belligerent states bear equal responsibility. In no country can the working class or the Communist Parties support the war. The bourgeoisie is not conducting war against fascism as Chamberlain and the leaders of the Labour Party pretend. War is carried on between two groups of imperialist countries for world domination. The international working class may under no conditions defend Fascist Poland which has refused the aid of the Soviet Union and repressed other nationalities. The division of States into fascist and democratic states has now lost its former sense.

From this point of view the tactics must be changed. The tactic of the Communist Parties in the belligerent countries in this first stage of the war is to operate against the war, to unmask its imperialist character. The Communist Parties have fought against the supporters of Munich because these have prevented a real anti-fascist front, with the participation of the Soviet Union, in order to be able to carry on a robber war. The war has fundamentally changed the situation. Where Communist Parties have representatives in Parliament these must vote against the war credits. It must be made clear to the masses that war will bring them nothing but new troubles and misery.

In the neutral states we must unmask the governments which maintain the neutrality of their own countries but support the war of other countries and operate on their



profits, as for example the Government of the United States has done with regard to the war between Japan and China. The Communist Parties have to take on everywhere the offensive struggle against the treacherous policy of Social Democracy. The Communist Parties which acted contrary to these tactics must now immediately correct their policy.

I will give you the wording of the resolution so that you can take it down.

The Central Committee declares that the present war is an imperialist and unjust war for which the bourgeoisie of all the belligerent states bear equal responsibility. In no country can the working class or the Communist Party support the war. The bourgeoisie is not conducting war against fascism as Chamberlain and the leaders of the Labour Party pretend. War is carried on between two groups of capitalist countries for world domination. The international working class can under no conditions defend Fascist Poland which has refused the aid of the Soviet Union and oppressed other nationalities. The division of States into fascist and 'democratic' states has now lost its former sense.

From this point of view the Central Committee declares that the tactics of the Communist Party must be changed. The task of the Party in this first stage of the war is to operate against the war, to unmask its imperialist character. The Communist Party has fought against the supporters of Munich because these have prevented a real anti-fascist front with the participation of the Soviet Union in order to be able to carry on a robber war. The war has fundamentally changed the situation.

The Central Committee instructs its representative in Parliament to vote against the war credits. It must be made clear to the masses that war will bring them nothing but new troubles and misery. The Central Committee further declares that it is necessary to begin an offensive struggle against the treacherous policy of the leadership of the Labour Party.

We shall propose that you keep carefully that text. We want no document of this character but this is the decisive resolution of the Central Committee. It has to be

communicated equally, if it is adopted by the Central Committee, to members of District Committees, who will equally need to take their personal note, and will have the same responsibility to communicate it to branches and to all Party organisations. And we have purposely kept absolutely close to the terms of the short thesis because we must have absolute identity on the international line of all parties on this issue.

The procedure we propose is: to throw open the discussion, to carry forward the discussion of last week, on the basis of this resolution together with the document here circulated which is only a draft, a draft with regard to what we should issue publicly as a Central Committee. That is, that on the assumption that we adopt this line, there will need to come out from the Central Committee a manifesto not dealing with the internal questions, with the special questions of analysis as delivered in our resolution here, but dealing with immediate concrete issues, especially the peace proposals, in such a way as to present the general line of the Party's campaign and propaganda in the present situation and in the light of this decision of our basic line.

We shall then take the vote on this main resolution and in the event of that vote resulting in the adoption of the resolution we shall recommend that this manifesto be remitted for editing in the light of the discussion.

I propose in this report to try to present as briefly as possible: first, the reasons for this policy; second, why our manifesto of 2 September was wrong; third, the arguments that have been put forward in defence of the old line and why we must reject these arguments; fourth, the immediate measure that we should adopt to carry out the new policy; and finally, the position on the Central Committee and the question of the vote.

On the basis of this line in the new world situation, I want to speak as sharply and simply as possible, I don't want to repeat old ground. It is simply this in a nutshell. From the moment of the rejection of the peace front we entered into a new world situation in which the old tactics of the peace front no longer applied, and we tried to go on

with the old line. That is the whole trouble in a nutshell. The Soviet Union, when they saw that this possibility of the peace front was not going to be realised, drew their conclusions, faced up to the completely different world situation and acted accordingly.

The Western sections tended not to face up but to try to cling to the old line which fitted worse and worse to the new facts; and therefore it is not because the Soviet Union has turned its policy that everyone has got to turn, as you will sometimes hear comrades in the Party say. It is an absolute foul slander that belongs to the *Daily Herald* and the Labour reformists.<sup>4</sup> It is because there is a new world situation, in relation to which the Soviet Union first grasped how to act, and every section of the International needs equally to understand this new situation and be capable of adapting its tactics in relation to it.

The next point I want to make is something that in the recent period we appear to be tending to forget, and that is that the basic antagonism of the modern world ever since 1917 is the antagonism of the capitalist world and the socialist world, of imperialism and socialism, of imperialism and the Soviet Union. That basic antagonism covers every other. All the particular phases of imperialist conflict, fascism and democracy and the rest of it, are phases in relation to that basic antagonism.

We tended to fix on one phase of one period expressed in this issue of fascism and democracy which takes its significance in relation to a whole world situation and to go on with it when the whole world situation had changed, when the whole significance had changed. Our clinging to this issue as the whole issue of the world situation, the conflict of democracy against fascism in the relation of international forces, meant in fact that we were sticking to British imperialism after it had broken with any possibility of aligning with the Soviet Union.

After German fascism had been compelled to amend itself in such a way that it abandoned its offensive leadership against the Soviet Union, we were tending to a position which was looking into the Soviet Union as a convenience for British imperialism, to pull the chestnuts

out of the fire;<sup>5</sup> how to win it for the purpose of British imperialism, a feeling of complaint when it did not act, when aggression was taking place on Poland and there was no action from the Soviet Union, the building up of hopes that by this means or that it should be brought in. Each successive action of the Soviet Union came not as a part of our whole understanding of the world situation, as one of the most triumphant periods of world socialism and its advance that we have had – instead there are shocks, difficulties, how to explain, how to defend. This shows that as a Party we have got right off the line of the international movement and the fight for world socialism.

We had failed to understand that we had entered into a new period, a revolutionary period, a growing revolutionary period, and we have to adapt our tactics and the understanding of this. That is the third point I make on the situation. That imperialist war means a revolutionary perspective. We have to achieve our understanding of that. Within a few weeks you already had these developments in Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> This ferment going on. In the war of 1914, it was years before these signs came up. Here they are coming up in a few weeks and coming out in a specific new form – this war differs from the war of 1914, in that the Soviet Union is in existence. That is an enormous, increasingly powerful factor which stimulates the advance of the world revolution. Specifically what is the change in the world situation since the rejection of the peace front?

First the role of British and French imperialism. Previously so long as there was the possibility of the peace front, there was the possibility of their playing a progressive role. Had a war developed on the basis of the peace front it would have been a just war. Why? Not because the imperialists of Britain and France would not have had their imperialist aims, but because, as we have said, the antagonism of imperialism and the Soviet Union is the basic world issue and that would have outweighed the imperialist aims of Britain and France, would have been a fundamental character of the war, making it a just war. Our error was to apply this conception of what you might call a peace front war, of a just war of that character,

to a war which arose from, and was based on, a refusal of the peace front and was purely an imperialist war.

Second with regard to Poland. The position of Poland, as you know, stated in the resolution, was one that cannot have had the support of the international working class. Not the same as Spain or Czechoslovakia. Now this has raised enormous feeling for comrades. It has not been easy for them to understand. It is one of the main sources of the difficulty and the trouble, the feeling that in any case this must be a just war, a war of national liberation. And we have here to understand and reject that estimate, we are dealing with the Polish state which refused the peace front, not merely the Polish state which was reactionary, which oppressed its nationalities and so on.

That need not have decided the issue if it had formed part of the peace front, that is, of a progressive combination, but it entered into an imperialist collaboration with Chamberlain in defeating and sabotaging the peace front. Thereby it brought on the war and thereby created an entirely different situation from Spain, Czechoslovakia, Abyssinia, every one of these countries.<sup>7</sup> For example Abyssinia: the illustration has been taken because Abyssinia was a reactionary country, with feudal institutions, oppression of the people, and yet we don't say that that was a reason for not supporting Abyssinia. Of course not. But Abyssinia was demanding the support of all countries. It was not against the peace front. It was for every support they could get in their struggle for their national independence. Not like the role of the Polish state where the government deliberately sacrificed their people because of their imperialist and class interests and collaboration with Chamberlain.

Therefore in the case of Poland we have a parallel with Belgium in 1914, because there also for the Belgian peasant who was being over-run by the German infantry, whose farms were being burnt, whose women and children were being attacked by the German armies, for them of course it felt a war for their lives for their homes, for their national liberation. Lenin nonetheless said that this was a war not of national liberation of the Belgian

people, but a part of an imperialist war brought on the Belgian people because their government had intrigued for years and fixed up its arrangements with the imperialists of Britain and France. The people have to suffer for the action of their governments. But the character of the war was such that Lenin condemned the role of Vandervelde and the Belgian Labour Party which supported it as much as any other in any country – its decisive character was that of the part of an imperialist war.

With regard to the position of German fascism. Equally a change in its world position. Previously the spearhead of international reaction. Leading the world reactionary front, with Britain aiding and abetting in the background against the Soviet Union. Now that world role has been weakened. It has been compelled to come to terms with the Soviet Union. To abandon publicly all these aims, to see the anti-Comintern Pact broken up. We are told the Soviet-German Pact has also strengthened Nazi Germany. The process is of course dialectical, but fundamentally Nazi Germany has been weakened by the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact and is more weakened every day as this process is continuing and is beginning to become clearer to more and more people.

Weakened in its imperialist aims, a defeat of its decisive aims in Eastern Europe. It was not Poland they were interested in. It went beyond to South Eastern Europe, the wealth of Romania; in the direction of the Balkans. All that is dropped. They have only poverty-stricken areas of Poland which increase their economic burdens, also the industrial parts. They received a check in this respect in their economic aims. They received a check ideologically in all that they stand for. There is the enormous strengthening of the position of the Soviet union not only in the other countries of Eastern Europe, but in the understanding of the people of Germany.

This is what has really produced a new world situation, because while German fascism is thus weakening in its world role, British and French imperialism, having rejected the peace front, come out more and more

definitely as the leaders of world reaction. German fascism was strong, not on the basis of its own strength but by the support of Britain which was the decisive strength. When that support is removed its position is changed. The one thing that they are in terror of is a prolongation of the war. The one thing that they are desperately searching for is peace because they know their weakness in respect to a prolonged war.

Therefore we have to see the decisive forces of the world situation, the decisive role of British and French imperialism in the world of imperialism. British and French imperialism are concerned not with the fear that they are going to be smashed and overrun by the Nazi machine. Their real fear is how not to defeat Germany too severely, in such a way as to let loose the real people's revolution or socialist revolution in Germany.

They more and more clearly are thinking in terms of that perspective, they are not seeing the danger of the Soviet-German Pact. Here comrades may have seen the statement in *The Times* on Saturday in regard to the question of Germany going Bolshevik: 'Here would seem to lie the greatest danger to the Western Powers and indeed to the whole of Europe'. That as the character of the situation is veering more and more from its old forms into one in which the two poles are British imperialism on the one side, and the Soviet Union on the other, and the struggle is over the body of the German people – whether they will reach liberation or be brought into subservience to British and French imperialism for strangling and preventing the advance of the world socialist revolution.

It is obviously a new situation in which we have to adjust our perspective. Therefore, you see, there is the meaning of saying that the significance of the distinction between the fascist and democratic states has gone. It does not exist any more in the same way as previously. Not the significance of the distinction for the internal regime, of the importance of the fight of the working class for democratic rights against the fascist attack on democratic rights. But the significance of the world role has changed in respect of the fascist states and the so-called democratic

states, and we have to recognise that change in the world role of these states. That with the anti-Soviet drive of British imperialism, the historical role of British imperialism as the leader of world counter-revolution is coming out more and more clearly, precisely as the needs of the war are bringing out the revolutionary forces.

So you see the growing anti-Soviet propaganda, the part of the Liberal-Labour press, the advance signs of the preparation. You see the attack on the French Communist Party, not simply because they would be against a sell-out. They are seeing also the perspective in which the basic fight-aim is the fight against the Soviet Union. They have used this opportunity already with this confusion that temporarily exists in the ranks of the labour movement because of the issue of fascism and the question of the new situation – to strike their blow already at the Communist Party and prepare the struggle against socialism, against the Soviet Union. Therefore in the light of this analysis of the new world situation which we have had to analyse, when we are attempting to operate with a line of the past period, we have now to state quite clearly for our own certainty why the manifesto of 2 September was wrong.

We must have no half-measures on this. We don't want to hear that we meant this all the time, that we knew that we were going to change our policy presently, we only did this as a first temporary stage. We were already shifting our policy and practice on to the new policy and the rest of it. That approach is not going to help, it is only going to make confusion and incapacity to carry out the line in the spirit of the line. The first necessity for the health of the Party is that among ourselves we face frankly and openly that our line was a wrong line. In this respect first, failure to show the imperialist character of the war. This is in respect of the manifesto. The pamphlet referred to the imperialist aims but also used the formulation 'just war'. Actually a contradiction. Second, the attack was directed on the capitulators, but not against British imperialism as a whole. Third, the formula of the struggle on two fronts,<sup>8</sup> which is the kernel of the manifesto, must be rejected.

A lot of comrades had difficulty on this. They say why



not the struggle on two fronts? Surely we are against both Hitler and Chamberlain? The fact that these questions are asked shows, after twenty years existence of our Party, how little the whole basis of Leninism has yet really entered into the thought and understanding, as soon as the problem presents itself in slightly new and different forms. You cannot conduct the struggle on two fronts because one excludes the other. You cannot simultaneously support an imperialist war once you have admitted it is an imperialist war and fight imperialism. It is a contradiction. The one cuts out the other.

Lenin spent his whole time showing again and again in relation to this problem of imperialist war, that you can't fight imperialism by fighting the enemy imperialism in a war. Certainly the enemy imperialism whether it is Czardom, Kaiserism or what you like is a foul imperialism, is an enemy of the working class, is a menace to the whole international working class. But if on the basis of all these arguments you say, yes, we fight imperialism and we attack this imperialism, you are not fighting imperialism, you are supporting your own imperialism. And that is why you cannot have the struggle on two fronts. It is the struggle on one front against our own imperialism.

Then finally you have the formula – not in the manifesto, but it was used further and very frequently in our discussion in the attempt to meet the situation of it being clearly an imperialist war – namely, transform the imperialist war into democratic anti-fascist war. That is, it is not yet democratic anti-fascist war but our aim as a Party should be to make it so. That formula we must also reject because that formula is attempting to pose the actual policy of the Party in a real situation on a hypothesis which does not exist. Because of a myth of a democratic anti-fascist war that is not there, we support imperialist war in the actual instance.

Therefore we can see the practical consequence of this line as it showed itself in the work of the Party. The practical consequences that in fact one front had excluded the other. The character of the propaganda of winning the war in the abstract without distinction of what kind of

war, a fight to a finish which bore the same character as any imperialist propaganda. The confusion and weakening of the industrial front and the entire work of the Party and the trade unions in the industrial field. From this line you get the most dangerous confusion, paralysis, a virtual demobilisation in the name of the confused belief that it is necessary to assist the prosecution of the war, it is necessary to make sacrifices for the national need and the rest of it. So that during these initial weeks there has been an offensive carried through against the workers which has not a parallel ever since the existence of the labour movement in this country. We as a Party have to take our share of responsibility in this, because by our line we helped to facilitate that.

And finally in the local propaganda which was carried out you would see again and again a complete disappearance of the political life of the Party and only carrying on with regard to the various immediate issues of utmost importance to carry on, but divorced from politics.

Now with regard to the arguments presented for the old line. The initial approach – the conception of the fight against fascism, of seeing this in terms of the issue of the fight against fascist aggression, democracy versus fascism, and so on, the failing to see the new features of the situation which had transformed all this led to a series of conclusions and arguments of a type that should never be heard in our Party. First impermissible arguments, Trotskyism, 5th Column and all that kind of thing, collapse of the Communist International and so on.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, re-emergence of national defencism.<sup>10</sup> The error might start because of the wrong understanding of the role of fascism, democracy and fascism. We understand that. We understand that is the origin of these errors. We had enormous lectures read to us by political Rip Van Winkles who repeated word for word all the ABC of the 7th Congress,<sup>11</sup> as if every Party member is not aware of that, when the important thing is to understand what is new for our tactics. But this degenerated into pure and simple national defencism of the same type that Lenin fought in 1914. Example after example can be brought

out for that. We had even here on this Central Committee a member bringing up the identical arguments used by Kautsky about Marx and Engels on the Franco-Prussian war which Lenin delivered a whole tirade against in order to expose and smash.

We had in the character of the propaganda and the way of presenting it as 'the Soviet Union are looking after their people, we are looking after ours', a complete ignoring of the distinction between a socialist country and a capitalist country, leading to the conception, 'they are justified to defend socialism therefore we are justified to defend imperialism'. All this is coming out of national defencism, with that support of British imperialism, in demanding questions being asked 'what imperialist aims has our government?' 'This is not like 1914, here are no secret treaties, here is no secret moving for annexation of territories'. What are the imperialist aims, the imperialist aims presented under the harmless guise 'defence of the war, which means defence of democracy'? How does one imperialism defend itself? Does it just sit at home? An imperialism defends itself by smashing the rival imperialism.

The imperialist aim is that they are determined to smash German imperialism, precisely as in 1914, the aim of the Second Versailles and the Super Versailles. The aim expressed more and more openly, as in the French imperialist press, is that the mistake of Versailles must not be repeated, that Germany must be broken into one hundred pieces. This imperialist aim strengthens the position of the fascist dictatorship in Germany, leads the German people to fight, feeling they are fighting for their lives and existence as a nation, because they see the Chamberlains, Churchills, etc, on the other side. And therefore next we have the anti-Soviet tendencies, the tendency to orientate the policy of the Party on the basis of the interests of British imperialism, inevitably leading to anti-Soviet tendencies.

First you complain that the Soviet Union does not come in, then proceed to speculations with all sorts of elements of imperialism. They too seek how to draw in the Soviet

Union, on the side of British imperialism. Expressions have been coming in which were expressions of a complete separation from the Soviet Union, treating them as one state amongst a series of states. It happens to be a socialist state. This is not our Communist conception, not our world Communist conception' they are right to do what they do. It is defensible, they are acting in their interests, we look after ours. This is the most vulgar and complete denial and misunderstanding of our international movement and our relationship to the Soviet Union.

And one last tendency, legalism. Normally an absolutely correct position. In difficult conditions we require to do everything to protect the work and the propaganda of the Party. But you would find these kind of expressions spreading about: how nice and easy our line is to explain to everyone, we are supporting the war, how well it goes down, how easy it is to put to everyone and what a much better condition we are in in carrying forward our work like this. And a feeling about a difference of line – what would that mean? Is it not going to mean that we are going to be crushed, isolated and cut off? The questions are serious and important, but the decision on the line is a political decision. There is only one question to determine, the basic correct political line, and finding a way to the masses on the basis of that line, knowing that that will reflect the development of events and will win the masses in the development of events if we know how to apply our tactic.

Coming now to the immediate measures for carrying out the line. Up to this point I have presented the line in its sharpest form deliberately. That is for our internal discussion. That clearing it is necessary to carry right through the Party in closed meetings of the party organisation, merciless ruthless clearing that results in absolute certainty and the conviction of every Party member where they stand and what they fight for. In the public work of the Party in carrying out this line we must prevent and stand against any sharp formulas whatever. We must not let come out, even as talk from Party members, phrases about turning imperialist war into civil

war and all that kind of thing. Our propaganda, our policy, must be based on simple concrete issues. Simple concrete issues of concern to people.

The language of the 7th Congress and its methods are essential, they are needed now more than ever. I am not dealing with particular tactical forms but that sort of approach of closeness to people, of simple immediate practical issues. Through them we are going to carry out the line on which we have theoretical clearness as a Party, and what is involved in the line. Further, as we know, we have a problem of a transition, a problem of the past statements and condemnation of the Party. We have to take the utmost care for the credit of the Party in the method of carrying on development of the policy that we put forward.

At the same time we have to recognise that here events have grown. In the original proposals, as brought back in Comrade Springhall's report last week, there is the question of the guard in the transition against the sudden *volte-face*, a point of very great importance. But we have had a certain change in the situation already by this week, because the peace proposals have forced a new situation. The articles which have appeared in *Pravda*, etc, have been printed all over the press, the whole question of the Communist approach is already out and therefore this makes a certain difference, in that it is no good our going into an absurdity of some complicated evolutions over a period of months when the militant workers are there long ago before us.

We have to find a commonsense presentation in relation to immediate issues – the peace proposals and so on – but we have to be ready to face quite sharply, and we must be on the look out against, those who will seek to carry forward the fight for the old line in the form of saying 'yes, we agree but take great care in the transition, be very guarded in the transition'. Or again, similarly, we have to fight absolutely against any sectarian distortion of this line, but we shall not allow defenders of the old line to use the sectarian slogan to cover up sabotage of the new line. We need to tackle in a practical spirit, in a close and

understanding spirit, the needs of the masses in the present situation, and that means two things for carrying out the line.

Our work as a Party is going to turn now on two things: the peace question and the mass issues at home. The peace question you will see in this draft manifesto, which still needs further revision, but you will see the indications of a line in relation to that, that is, we concentrate the question on the issue of the war aims, for what are they conducting the war? This question is widely asked on all sides, is arousing great attention already, and to it an official answer is consistently refused. And here you may note that this is just the same as in the last war. There was a letter of Wells<sup>12</sup> in which he pointed out how he was in charge of their propaganda during the last war, and how for the purpose of their propaganda in Germany they asked the government again and again to have a statement on war aims.

We get that position again now. They won't give a statement on war aims. That is the clearest indication of the imperialist war aims. Therefore we take this restoration of Poland, and see the complete transformation of that situation now eastern peoples have been liberated. We take the question of the overthrow of Hitlerism, and what they mean by that, and we take up the demand for the initiating of peace negotiations in the light of this changed situation, and to include the Soviet Union. Including the Soviet Union, because you may very well have sections and tendencies in Britain and France which will endeavour, as they have previously endeavoured, to find a basis with German reaction whereby they can tear it away from the Soviet Union and turn it against the Soviet Union. We differentiate sharply from such sections by our demand for peace negotiations, and a peace conference including the Soviet Union, the presence of which transforms the character of the peace and significance when reached.

Alongside that is our central political issue. We need without delay to concentrate the work of the Party on the mass issues on which enormous growing feeling exists in

the country, that we have been extremely behindhand in voicing, purely because of our wrong line. There is the budget, the most outrageous budget that any one has ever seen, and yet in our paper it takes the form of initial paragraphs because some economist saw them and sent in to appear in the Notebook, bringing out the things which were striking everyone in the country the moment they saw the budget.<sup>13</sup> In the sense of the heat of agitation that we want, and now on the basis of our line and understanding of our line, we shall also get the correct approach to these issues, which were really those of the people: the question of the Budget, prices, supplies, the complete disorganisation with regard to all the interests of the people, pensions and unemployment benefit, the rise in the cost of living, the question of wages, of rent, increase of wages in relation to the cost of living, hours, overtime, the whole programme of defence in the trade union movement, the fight against the demobilisation and virtual liquidation of a fighting trade union movement in wartime. All these become the fields of our fight in which we are developing the movement, carrying forward practically our general line.

So for the relations of the Party and the labour movement, we have, as stated there, to sharpen the fight against the collaborators with the government, against that entire policy of paralysis of the labour movement, and tying up with the government. We don't want that fight to turn into one of breaking the links with the mass labour organisations, or a general attack on all members of the Labour Party and the like. On the contrary, it is now more than ever of importance for the Party to build up, to develop every form of contact with the mass labour movement. The tactics of the united front continue.<sup>14</sup>

Naturally in relation to a leadership which is in direct coalition with the war government, a question of the united front proposition again arises. In that sense there is a change of condition, but the essence of the tactic of the united front goes forward, that is the maximum unity of all the forces of the labour movement for the struggle for the interests of the people, and fields of struggle in spite of

differences which may exist on the war questions, but where we may find common ground.

Similarly with regard to the conception of the people's movement. Naturally the whole question of the government is changed by these conditions, because the type of people's government advocated before, based essentially on the Labour and Liberal parties and the like, would be an imperialist government, would be an imperialist war government. It has no meaning and no aim for us. But the conceptions of the people's movement as outlined and elaborated in the report to the last Congress of the Party, these remain equal and of more importance than ever. The development around the tenants' issues, Air Raid Precautions and the rest, around the new questions of prices, can be the development of all forms of citizen's committees movements, and so on, of this essential work for the Party.<sup>15</sup>

I only want to say in conclusion that the Party is now on trial as it has never been since the beginning of its history. It is on trial for its capacity to respond to an international line and for its capacity to carry out the international line. We are going to need all forces in the conditions that we have to face, and in the fight that we shall have before us. We want no half-hearted supporters, no vacillators, no faint-hearts. Every responsible position in the Party must be occupied by a determined fighter for the line. Right through the Party and through every organisation of the Party. We are going into a fight. We cannot go into it with the burden of a wrong line – in this first few weeks that is already a heavy burden for us, with the confusion, the weakness the half-hearted kind of sentiments we have had to have the past week.

We must go on with clearness, with confidence, with a line that is definite and that can answer every issue and event as it arises, with a Party that is kneaded together and fights together on a complete unity of aim, understanding and purpose. Therefore, when you come to the vote, there are those who say, well, I don't agree with this line but it is an international decision so I have to vote for it as a matter of decision. That sort of position is not a Communist



position, and is not going to be of use to the Party. Communist discipline is not a mechanical robot discipline. The duty of a Communist is not to disagree but accept. Those comrades forget that there is the duty of a Communist to think and to understand the line in order to be capable of applying it.

The votes that we want you to cast, we want you to cast on the basis of conviction, clearly, definitely, on the basis of conviction. We want supporters of the line who will be capable of fighting for the line and inspiring confidence and enthusiasm in the line wherever they go. We may be meeting in conditions in which it may be some time before we meet again. It is necessary to speak with absolute frankness. This crisis has shown dangerous tendencies existing in the Party. Tendencies that we have to be aware of and that we have to determine to change. There is no question of self-reticence here. We were all agreed on that original manifesto. It is a question of being capable of facing up to a wrong thing and determining, not in a half-hearted spirit but in a whole-hearted spirit, the fight for the line that is the correct line and the international line.

These tendencies have shown themselves terrifically in this crisis. We know anti-International tendencies, a contemptuous attitude to the International, anti-Soviet tendencies, the kind of thing that began already from the time of the trials, talk of collapse of the International, talk of the Soviet Union following its interests and the like, talk of our being an independent Party, all kinds of things like that, that are a reflection of enemy outlooks, of imperialist and labour reformist outlooks that have no place in the Party. I hope that with the frank facing of this issue from the Party we are going to make an end once and for all of such tendencies. We are going to become a real section of the Communist International, with every member heart, soul and body, every fibre, a fighting member of the Communist International, and for the line of the International. It is on that basis that we want you to make your decisions, each one of you and your votes. This will go through. This line will be carried through.

In the crisis that we have to face, the tests that we are going to have to face as a Party – past conditions have been easy conditions – we have tests to face now, any member who in such a moment deserts from active work for the Party will be branded for his political life. Therefore we say you have, each one of you, to make the most important and responsible political decision in your lives. We want you to make it with your entire hearts and convictions. We want to vote on that basis, the adoption of this policy on the basis of conviction and support from the membership of the Central Committee. We are confident that we are going to get it, we are confident that we shall have the support of the membership of the Party.

### Notes

1. Dutt is referring to the Joint Declaration of the Soviet and German Governments on the War made on 28th September 1939. This states:

The German Government and the Government of the USSR, having finally settled by the treaty signed today the questions arising from the dissolution of the Polish State, and having thereby created a firm foundation for a lasting peace in eastern Europe, in mutual agreement express the opinion that the liquidation of the present war between Germany on the one hand and England and France on the other would be in the interests of all nations. Therefore both Governments will direct their common efforts, if necessary in accord with other friendly powers, to attain this aim as soon as possible. If, however, these efforts of both Governments remain unsuccessful it will be established thereby that England and France bear responsibility for the continuation of the war, and in the event of the continuation of the war the Governments of Germany and the USSR will consult each other on the necessary measures.

2. The following editorial statement appeared in the *Daily Worker* of 30 September 1939 under the headline 'A People's Government Could Secure Lasting Peace':

Arising from the decision taken in Moscow and the peace declaration which has followed, an entirely new situation confronts the people of this country and of Europe.

This demands the serious attention of all political leaders and all political parties.

The war was supported on the part of the working class, in the belief that it was for the purpose of stopping Nazi aggression.

For the imperialists it had a quite different significance.

Chamberlain and his associates were not concerned to secure the defeat of Fascism, on the contrary their whole policy has been to strengthen fascism and to foment war against the Soviet Union.

Without their aid, Hitler could never have achieved the conquest of Austria and Czechoslovakia, nor could the Fascists have carried through their brutal invasion of Spain.

Only when their own imperialist interests are threatened do they engage in war on Nazi Germany. All this is becoming clear to the workers.

But the working class, while it will not allow itself to be led to the slaughter for imperialist aims, wants the defeat of Nazi aggression because of the very real threat it contains to working-class organisation and working-class freedom.

Can this desire of the workers to check and ultimately finish Fascist aggression be achieved as a result of these proposals? This is the paramount question.

The Nazi plans for the domination of Europe and the world depended on establishing their control of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

These plans have been shattered by the action of the Soviet Union, which bars the way to any further advance in this direction.

Can we guard the West in a similar manner? With a combination of the powerful working-class and peace forces in Europe, and the assistance of the Soviet Union, we believe this is possible.

In the meantime, nothing can stop the ferment of discussion going on in the German factories, and the new great impulse for throwing off the unbreakable yoke of Nazi oppression; and we must see to it that nothing stops the ferment in this country to get rid of the Chamberlain Government and to replace it with a people's government that will, in unison with the Soviet Union, work out a lasting peace in Europe.

These are matters that must be discussed in all their bearings.

To talk of war to the end, which means the wholesale slaughter of the youth of Europe, would be sheer madness. *Editorial Board*

3. The peace front was the designation given to the alliance sought by the USSR with Britain, France and other states to contain Nazi Germany. Negotiations between the USSR and the Western powers finally broke down on 17 August 1939. Thereafter the USSR turned its attention to negotiations with Nazi Germany.
4. The *Daily Herald* was founded in 1912 following a printers' strike-paper of the same name. From 1929 it was owned by the TUC and Odham's Press Ltd. The paper reflected Labour Party policy editorially until 1960 when the TUC sold its stake, and it ceased publication a few years later.
5. This was the phrase used by J.V. Stalin in his report to the 18th congress of the CPSU on 10 March 1939. Stalin outlined one of the

CPSU's tasks in the area of foreign policy thus:

to be cautious and not allow our country to be drawn into conflicts by the war-mongers who are accustomed to have others pull the chestnuts out of the fire for them.

6. Dutt has in mind the reported enthusiasm of the largely Ukrainian and Belorussian population of Eastern Poland for the revolutionary reorganisation of their society following the Red Army's occupation.
7. The Comintern organised massive campaigns against the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, the fascist revolt in Spain in 1936, and Hitler's invasions of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939. In each case the right of these nations to defend themselves against fascist aggression was vigorously asserted, and it was considered the duty of working-class organisations to support their resistance. This policy had been spelt out clearly by Togliatti (Ercoli) at the 7th Comintern congress in 1935. When Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, the communist parties initially saw this as another example of fascist aggression to be resisted.
8. This was the CPGB's initial wartime policy of fighting fascism abroad and Chamberlain at home (see M. Johnstone's introduction p.17).
9. The Spanish fascist General Mola boasted at the beginning of the civil war in Spain that in addition to the four columns of his regular army sent to capture Madrid he had a 'fifth column' of fascist sympathisers within the city.

Communists believed the Trotskyists to be the 'fifth column' inside the labour movement. The Trotskyists' immediate denunciation of the Second World War as an imperialist war was seen as evidence of their treachery.

Dutt's arguments here are aimed at J.R. Campbell. At the central committee meeting on 24 September, Campbell said that if it opposed the war, the CPGB would be returning to the position held by the Trotskyists. He argued further:

we do not want to change from being sponsors of the International Brigade to sponsors of the fifth column ... we now have Hitler, Doriot (French fascist leader) and the Belgian Communist Party all working the same line. They have carried it to a logical conclusion, and we have the beginnings of it here.

10. Certain socialist leaders (eg Vandervelde) during the First World War justified their support for their country's war effort by arguing that since their country had been attacked, it had a right to 'national defence'. This attitude was deplored by the anti-war wings of the socialist parties, and particularly by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Opposition to 'national defencism' became one of the most important tests of revolutionary sincerity. Dutt here implies that supporters of the war effort have failed that test.
11. In referring to 'Rip Van Winkles', Dutt is again attacking Campbell, as well as Pollitt and others, who had referred at length to the

resolutions of the 1935 7th Comintern congress at the 24 September central committee meeting. It was Hymie Lee who had referred at the same meeting to Marx and Engels' attitude to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, during which Marx and Engels had initially favoured the German side as waging a war of national defence.

12. The writer H.G. Wells had a letter published in *The Times* on 26 September 1939 on the question of the British government's war aims. He compared the government's reticence to state its war aims precisely with a similar reluctance during the First World War.
13. Dutt has in mind here the *Daily Worker's* coverage of the first war budget proposals of 27 September 1939. The budget raised income taxes, indirect taxes and reduced tax allowances. Although the budget was the leading story on the front page of the *Daily Worker* the next day, it was not the subject of editorial comment. Walter Holmes' 'Worker's Notebook' column in the *Daily Worker* of 29 September contained some calculations prepared by some unnamed accountant showing that the budget would affect working-class incomes disproportionately. The next day Holmes' column carried a further item, based on computations made by communist economist Maurice Dobb. Dobb's figures showed that the effect of the budget proposals on workers' incomes would be more drastic. Dutt considered the *Daily Worker's* response to the budget to be thoroughly inadequate.
14. The term 'united front' usually refers to collaboration between communist parties and social-democrats. The policy of working for united fronts was first formulated by the third congress of the Comintern in 1921. At different times the policy was interpreted in various ways. It was given much greater prominence from shortly before the 7th Comintern congress in 1935 as the 'united front against fascism and war'. This congress also envisaged the extension of the united front of working-class organisations into a wider 'people's front', involving non-socialist, but anti-fascist forces. In France and Spain these 'people's fronts' took the form of government coalitions.
15. The Communist Party was active throughout 1939 with other political groups in campaigns for tenants' rights and for Air Raid Precautions. The ARP campaign was instrumental in compelling the government to take the question of bomb shelters seriously.

## *William Gallacher*

Comrades, you will permit me to say that I have never at this Central Committee listened to a more unscrupulous and opportunist speech than the one which has just been delivered. But before dealing with the speech proper it is necessary for me to say that after the adjourned Central Committee meeting our Comrade Pollitt found himself in an impossible position. There is one thing that has always been asked of comrades. There is one thing that comrades, if we are ever to have an effective Party, must try to evidence. And that is a measure of loyalty one to the other. Comrade Pollitt had the responsibility for leadership of the Party. Anything he wrote, any line he took, was taken in consultation with the other leaders of the Party and with the Central Committee. But Comrade Pollitt always got the responsibility of making principal public utterances. And he always got the responsibility of publishing principal Party statements.

So Comrade Pollitt, in line with his work, got the responsibility of preparing a pamphlet on the Party's position on the war. That pamphlet is published. All of the comrades acknowledged it as a splendid pamphlet. Comrade Dutt especially complimented Comrade Pollitt on it being one of the finest things that he had produced, so clearly and simply presented. Comrade Dutt of course is entitled to make mistakes as well as any one else. But since the telegram comes, with that particular paragraph in it, there is a sudden change of attitude, and not the slightest thought is evidenced for the position that the leader of the Party is in. Not the slightest thought. Of course when the telegram comes Party comrades must face this particular proposal or this statement that is in the telegram. And so I

went in there saying we must give this serious consideration, Comrade Pollitt is going to produce a very difficult position for all of us. This is something that the comrades might say, but we had the attitude of, as soon as something like this comes, seizing on to it and no thought for the comrade at all with whom they have been associated.

You have had another evidence today. When Comrade Pollitt was forced to retire, there was general agreement in the Political Bureau that I should take the chair at the Central Committee meeting and see what was possible to get the very best results from a very difficult position for the Party. That was generally agreed to. But this morning when I am in here I am not to be allowed to take the chair. The three ruthless revolutionaries have decided to clear all opportunist scum out of the road. And what happens? On Friday afternoon when we had a Political Bureau there were two documents, one from Comrade Campbell, one from the other comrades. I did not like either of them. I did not want a mechanical presentation of this question. Of course it is a desirable thing that the Soviet Union should work for peace. But the peace terms have not been proposed. That is the important thing.

We have not got to come out and say here is a peace proposal that must be accepted. This would be madness. We have to see the peace proposals. Everyone has to see them. The Soviet Union will be a party to the peace proposals, but Nazi Germany is also a party to the proposals. But obviously we don't come out and say that whatever comes forward must be accepted. We say to the workers this is a very good and desirable move. Let us hope that the peace proposals are such as will satisfy us, as will ensure that with the masses of the people getting together we can get a peace that will put an end to aggression and guarantee an end to the uneasy truce that has been existing for a considerable time. So I draw up a document, the comrades discuss it, there are some amendments made to it, it was very loosely drawn up. I only wrote it while sitting there at the meeting, some amendments were made.

Comrades, it is permissible for any member of that Political Bureau to come here and say 'I believe we have made a mistake in publishing that document. I think it was not a good document'. Any member of the Political Bureau was entitled to come here and say, 'I believe we made a mistake in publishing that document in the Daily. I don't think it was good. I think we should have had a better document, a clearer and sharper document'. But comrades, never had I known anything so rotten, so mean, so despicable, so dirty as a creature to come along here and say 'we three were opposed to it'. Is that leadership? Was that loyalty to a Political Bureau?

(Interjection) It was not correct.

**Gallacher** – Never mind whether it was correct or not. Comrades, it is impossible for me to associate myself or to work with these men. That is the position.

But the document was 'incoherent'. Did you pay attention to Comrade Dutt's speech? Every conceivable phrase was brought in. But he even got to the stage where the situation has so transformed itself that he almost had us coming out for defence of potential Soviet Germany against the rapacious British and French imperialism. At any rate he presented the idea – and ideas are important things from the point of revolutionaries – the potential Soviet Germany is to be defended against the rapacious British and French imperialism. Well, we have not got anywhere near that stage yet. The Fascists and Nazis do not exist to bring about a Soviet Germany.

**J.R. Campbell** – (interjection) The article in *The Times* was that the Nazis were going to bring about a Bolshevist revolution in Germany.

**Gallacher** – You have to go somewhere else for your dialectics, Comrade Dutt, not to *The Times*.



Then there is the talk about getting themselves clear in relation to the Labour leadership, so that we reach a situation where you have the Labour leadership and the labour movement. You have the horizontal division. We have been going from horizontal to political, and then back from political to horizontal and so on, and the result has continually been confusion as far as the Party and the labour movement is concerned. But there is in the labour movement throughout the country, in every district, the tendency to division, in every local Labour Party as well as in every district of the Labour Party. I don't care what comrade speaks here, if they know anything about the Labour Party at all, they will be able to see that there are certain individuals in the Labour Party who are fully tied up with Chamberlain and there are others who want to fight against Chamberlain. And what applies in every section of the Labour Party in the country applies in the leadership.

I already drew attention on the Political Bureau to the fact that last week, when the Chancellor introduced his Budget and Attlee got up to make a reply, as soon as Attlee made the first criticism that has been made, the first slight few words directed against the National Government as being responsible for our troubles, there was a spontaneous outburst of applause from the Labour benches. The first time that there has been any criticism or any suggested criticism of the National Government. On Friday when I was down there, there was a pause. And in the pause Shinwell comes in. As soon as he comes in he says, well this is an extraordinary turn events have taken. What it may mean. Well, this new situation has developed, it must receive serious discussion. 'What a new situation!', etc. But the fact remains that the differentiation that exists in every local and district Labour Party exists, although maybe not to such a great extent, in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the leadership. Can we do anything about that? Is it possible for us to use that?

True, if a decision comes from the Communist International it must be seriously considered. We must think it out and try to understand it. But it does not follow

that there should be mechanical acceptance. I might remind the comrades once again of a piece of mechanical acceptance that I have never forgotten. I don't think the mechanical acceptance of 'social fascism' acted to the advantage of the Party anywhere. Then we had a big fight on the question of the general strike. The Communist International approved of the policy of the general strike. Well, for months and months we fought on the Executive over that. We reached a situation where we met one Sunday, the campaign for the general strike had been going on for months and then it died out.

At that Central Committee meeting I had the *Workers Weekly*, the *Worker*, and the *Sunday Worker*, the three papers that were being run then. We were considering that day a resolution from the Communist International, and in that resolution there was a paragraph which started with 'the campaign for the general strike in Great Britain must be intensified'. Three papers, and not one of the three papers had a mention of the general strike. It was as dead as the dodo, so I suggested to the comrades of the Central Committee that they should accept the resolution from the Communist International with that paragraph deleted. Would they do it? No. They accepted the paragraph that the campaign for the general strike be intensified, but the campaign never got another word after that. That is mechanical acceptance.

**Dutt** – (interjection) It is complete confusion. We are dealing with a whole line for a whole period.

**Gallacher** – I am prepared to take the thesis and the general line of it and show a measure of acceptance, but I am prepared to make corrections in this thesis or propose corrections for this thesis. Let me say here that I was one of those who, before this thesis came, warned the comrades of the necessity of examining this in order to avoid anything in the nature of the collapse of the International. I drew attention to the fact that the American Party was taking one line in keeping with the

the line of Roosevelt, the French party was taking another line in keeping with the line of the French government, that the Belgian Party was taking another and absolutely different line, and that we were completely lacking in guidance from the Communist International. I proposed that we should immediately get in touch in order to have consultations with the Communist International, and that the comrades should be ready to go over there immediately to have consultations in order to work out the line. And I am quite prepared for consultations to work out the line on the basis of the thesis, but I am not prepared to accept the thesis as it is at the moment.

But Comrade Dutt says, we must accept it. But not a mechanical acceptance. It is our duty to think, he says. Well I wish to god Comrade Dutt would do a little thinking. Let us do a bit of thinking. Comrade Dutt says the document in the paper was incoherent. What was in the fourth paragraph? What did it say? 'Can the desire of the workers to check and ultimately to finish fascist aggression be achieved as a result of these proposals?' This is incoherent. Well, we will see in a moment. For Comrade Dutt and his colleagues have presented us with a document. He accepts the thesis. He is for the fight on one front. He has every conceivable phrase in the course of his speech that makes him absolutely correct and a devoted servant to the Communist International and surely the Communist International will all be very happy to know that.

Comrade Dutt says in the course of his speech, in order to be sure that everything is in, we must frankly and openly admit that our line was a wrong one. If you take the document with which you have been presented, and you look at the first page, you will see at the third bottom paragraph 'the Communist Party has always declared that while the people of this country are sincerely striving for the aims of democracy and for the aims of peace against aggression, the British and French reactionaries have let loose this war not for the defence of democracy and protection of peace but for their own imperialist aims'.

**Dutt** – (interjection) We must be frank and clear with ourselves. In internal Party discussions dealing with the transition we had to defend, revise and reword and did not come out and say that we were all wrong.

**Gallacher** – I have it all right. The phrases for each part. You will explain it or maybe your colleague Comrade Rust will do the explaining for you.

**Whittaker** – (interjection) I do not think the personal points are any good.

**Roche** – Let us understand it quite clearly. If the comrades are using hard words, there is no necessity for us to disrupt the proceedings. Let the hard words be used if necessary.

**Allison** – I am not a member of the Central Committee I have listened very carefully to Comrade Dutt's statement, and if Gallacher had not jumped up so quickly I was going to interpose and suggest that either the Central Committee should get to know everything, or all the very bad assertions in Comrade Dutt's speech should be withdrawn. I have come here prepared to examine the political issues but am quite convinced that the members of the Central Committee cannot get clear on the political issues unless an entirely different tone is adopted in the discussion from what was contained in many parts of Comrade Dutt's report.

**Dutt** – I will make one statement. In presenting this report I did not want to deal with any personal issues whatever. We want and are concerned only with the politics in it. We want the unity of every comrade on the Central Committee on the basis of this line. I am fighting for one thing only. We have no half-hearted acceptance. We have got to have a whole-hearted acceptance to operate this line. We want every member on that basis. And any fight that we have

conducted also in dealing with issues of this kind, believe me, comrades I don't want any personal issue in this whatever. When I brought this up it is because it is the half-way position which I believe is fatal. I am concerned, we all of us need to be concerned, entirely with the issue of the line, to fight hard on the issue of the line, not any personal question whatever.

**Gallacher** – I will read out once again that part (of the *Daily Worker* statement) in detail: “Can this desire of the workers to check and ultimately to finish fascist aggression” to “any further advance in this direction”. Go on to the middle of page 2 in today's document: “the Communist Party has stood and will always stand for firm and unyielding resistance to fascism at home and abroad”, to “Nazi domination in Europe”.<sup>1</sup> Will any comrade kindly tell me what is the difference in that to the statement in the *Daily Worker*? “Checked in the East, what does the stopping of Nazi domination of Europe now mean but a check in the West?” It is there. If this is incoherent, what is to be said about this? “Today Nazi aggression has been checked and limited by the power of the Soviet Union. Can it be finished for good” ... “in this situation if the popular forces play their part”, etc.

So that we are faced here with a situation in this document where it is not simply a question of a fight against Chamberlain but a fight against Chamberlain which will enable us to finish Nazi domination and Nazi aggression in Europe. It is in this document. Nobody can persuade me or anybody else from the reading of this document that it is a fight on one front. It is the fight on two fronts. Because, Comrade Dutt, if it is a fight against British imperialism, Nazi aggression does not enter into the picture. But when you present the question of peace as one of putting a stop to Nazi aggression, then you come on to the proposition of how you are going to get such a peace as will stop Nazi aggression or Nazi domination of Europe with all it means to the working class.

That brings you smack up against the necessity of

getting rid of Chamberlain government and the imperialist aims of the Chamberlain government. And if you are going to get rid of the Chamberlain government what are you going to do next? You are dealing with the working class.

Let Esther Henrotte go to a Co-operative Guild or a trade union meeting, get Comrade Dutt to go and talk to a body of trade unionists or co-operators. Get rid of the Chamberlain government, but what is going to happen? Do we have no government to come after that? Nazi aggression in Europe. It is dealt with here. But then when we come down to the bottom of the page we get, 'This war of British and French imperialism is bringing intolerable burdens on the people'. By the time you get to the bottom of the page we have got round to the thesis again. Comrade Dutt becomes 100 per cent a loyal acceptor and so you get: 'this war of British and French imperialism is bringing intolerable burdens', etc, instead of putting what should have been the correct way, the British and French imperialists are using this war to put heavy burdens on the people.

But to say this war of British and French imperialism, and leave the Nazi aggressors out after drafting them in beforehand, this is only playing with the working class. This is not theoretical clarity. This is not evidence of thinking. This is evidence of trying to get all the phrases in whether they are in accord one with the other or not. So what do you get as a result of this assumption? The idea of a democratic government and a democratic war is simply thrown aside by Comrade Dutt. Actually we should never have used the term of democratic war in the sense that we did. What we should always be insisting on is a democratic government to make immediately a democratic peace. But are we to have no question of the kind of a democratic government and a democratic war? Are we to have no kind of government or any kind of peace? The question is not answered in this document. Of course it leaves the position open. When we are discussing with ourselves, Comrade Dutt, we are not concerned with

any other government of a democratic character. The only thing we are concerned about, if you accept the logic of Comrade Dutt's speech, is not an alternative government of any kind, but with the overthrow of capitalism and a revolutionary government of the working class.

We are not concerned with anything else, that is between ourselves. That is the logic of your speech and argument. But we cannot come out and say that to the working class. The situation is not favourable for coming out and drawing the logic from his speech, and saying to the working class, we don't want any democratic government, we don't want any alternative, other than the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class and a revolutionary workers' government. So, because we cannot say that to the working class, we are left in the position where we can say nothing. We are not for the Chamberlain government. But we don't want a democratic government in its place. That is the situation. If you have any doubts about it, you have a series of slogans. Slogans must be in conformity with the line of the Party, and slogans crystallise in an easily understood form the kernel of the Party line and attitude towards the working class.

What are the slogans? "For immediate peace negotiations." There has never been any mention made of the basis of peace negotiations. "Support of the Soviet Union." Alright, we want that, it is desirable and a good slogan. "Stop the Plundering of the People". "Down with Prices and Taxation." "Immediate Wage Increases to meet Higher Prices." "Hands off Democratic Rights." "Down with the Chamberlain government". "Forward in the Fight for Socialism." And so, after all these protestations of loyalty to the Communist International, and "only those who accept it in word and deed wholeheartedly in this period", Comrade Dutt presents us with our concluding and decisive slogan, stolen from the columns of the *New Leader* and the ILP.

Comrades, I say again, I have never in all my experience of this Central Committee, listened to a more unscrupulous and opportunist speech than has been made by Comrade Dutt, and I have never had in all my experience

in the Party such evidence of mean despicable disloyalty to comrades as has been evidenced by these three. It is impossible to work with them.

*Notes*

1. This is the draft version of the manifesto issued after the Central Committee session. The full text of the draft is not extant.



## *J.R. Campbell*

Comrades, I think this discussion would have proceeded in a better way if Comrade Dutt had not got up to open by making a series of charges against a person or persons unknown, and if he had fixed names and places to the various indictments of persons that he was obviously engaged in, in making his speech. Because for the greater part of the things that Comrade Dutt enumerated, he talks as if he was some schoolmaster sent to correct a class of unruly children, someone arriving from some other planet, and not one of the principal parties in all the mistakes which he enumerated at such length. However, he performed one service in his speech and that was, he showed the completeness of the change of line that you are now being asked to accept. A complete revolution in all our conceptions.

We started with the idea of 'support this war, but fight for a new government to carry it on'. We are now asked to go over, to oppose this war and use the situation to smash capitalism. We started to demand democracy for the colonies, we must now come away from that and actively support colonial insurrection. We started by saying that we had an interest in the defeat of the Nazis, we must now recognise that our prime interest is in the defeat of France and Great Britain, because that will furnish the suitable conditions for a revolution in this country. We were to demand democracy in the army, we now have to change that and work for disruption in the capitalist army. We were to demand a Labour and democratic government, now we are to insist on no unity with any Labour or democratic forces who support this war, on the broad issues of war or peace, whatever we may have on economic

issues. We started out by proclaiming the defence of the British people from fascism, we are now told that the defence of the British people from fascism is imperialism, that there can be no defence of the British people until there is a revolutionary government in this country.

That is a brief outline and I could go on exhaustively on the completeness of the change that we are taking. We have not only to make a change in our entire policy, we have to eat everything we have said as to the estimation of the war over the last 2/3 years. We have to eat all that we have said arising from something not later than the *Short History of the CPSU*. Because this war was not unexpected. We analysed the coming of this war. We laid down the forces that were going to operate on each side. Our literature not only analysed the war, it said exactly where the war would break out.

Comrade Springhall tells us that the estimation on the other side<sup>1</sup> was that it was a wide extension of the 'second imperialist war'. We read in the textbooks that the second imperialist war is a war whose object in the final analysis is an attack on the capitalist interests of France, Britain and the USA; that German imperialism is out for a forcible division of the map of Europe; that it planned to strike at Austria, Czechoslovakia and then maybe at Poland, and then after Poland we shall see. That was our estimation as we saw the forces living and growing. The estimation of Nazi aggression fighting a war against the capitalist interests of France, Britain and the United States of America, and as late as 31 August, *Pravda* tells us,<sup>2</sup> 'but today there can be no talk of a sudden outbreak of war. The culprits and instigators of that war are known and its centres are known to all. That this is seen as fascism'.

We were quite clear in this, that Poland was simply a step in the chain of Nazi aggression for the domination of Europe. What is the use of comrades saying it is different from Spain and Czechoslovakia? It is one of the links of the chain. Then Poland. Then someone else. Dimitrov outlined a whole series of possibilities in his pamphlet, *After Munich*. And therefore we are in the absurd position that the war we predicted has come, it has broken out in

the place we said it would break out, but we have got to revise completely our fundamental conceptions of the character of that war. We have now got to blame the war on to Poland and France and Britain.

Here is *Pravda*. After describing the Soviet German Non-Aggression Pact, it goes on to say 'Poland's ill-starred rulers, instigated by the incendiaries of world war, attempted to disrupt the peace established in Eastern Europe. They wanted to convert Eastern Europe and the entire European continent into a huge conflagration', etc. *Izvestiya*<sup>3</sup> says, 'First Poland, then France and Britain with her numerous vassals and dominions have entered the war against Germany'. Never since the Abyssinians attacked the Italian empire, and the Boers attacked the British Empire, have we had such an analysis. In the face of the whole world, in the face of the fact that the British and French governments held out for 48 hours after the war had started, trying to initiate a peace, we have now got to get on this line and say the war was started by Poland attacking Nazi Germany, because there has been a change, and the danger is no longer a danger of a fascist domination of Europe, the danger is the danger of British and French imperialism miraculously breaking through the Siegfried line, over-running Germany, installing a government in Germany which will fight the Soviet Union and then going on to a war against the Soviet Union, and so on.

I want to suggest to the comrades here that this is the stuff of which dreams are made. There is not an iota of evidence that Nazi Germany, having got Poland, has ceased to be an aggressive power. There is not an iota of evidence that a power flushed with a cheap and easy victory, with booty in its hands, with new industrial resources in its hands for waging a war, can now be taken as ceasing its aggressive objects, and has become an object of the depredations of British and French, and presumably Polish, imperialism.

I myself accept the view that British imperialism is defending its imperialist interests. Who ever doubted that for a single moment? But I say that British imperialism, in

defending its imperialist interests, is hindering objectively the spread of the fascist system in Europe. What a defeat for France and Britain will face you with, comrades, is not the perspective of world revolution, but the perspective of a Fascist Europe and the coming of fascism in this country. And I cannot understand the comrades who argue that an expansion of Soviet territory means growth of Socialist power, which is true, refuse to face the implication that an expansion of fascist territory means the growth of fascist counter-revolutionary power, which can ultimately be directed against the Soviet Union.

Now with regard to the Soviet-German negotiations. The Soviet aim, in my opinion, in these negotiations was perfectly clear. It was to secure for itself a breathing space, a strengthening of its position and increase of its territory, an increase of its diplomatic weight in the world, against the threat of an ultimate struggle with the capitalist world, but utilising imperialist contradictions in order to do so.

We have many examples of how it did that in the past, how it used Weimar Germany against France and Britain, how it tried to co-operate with France and Britain against the Nazis, and how, when it thought it was being called to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for French and British imperialism, it concluded the Soviet German-Pact and faced the British and French imperialists with the alternatives of capitulation on the question of Poland, or of war. But we must really ask ourselves the question, why did the Nazis sign the Soviet-German Pact? They did this in order, in the given relation of forces, to acquire the most favourable opportunities for extending German territory and, with the extension of German territory, extending the fascist system.

A great deal of talk has been made in the capitalist press, who by the way are seeking to minimise the extent of their defeat in Poland, about Hitler's inconsistency, but Hitler was consistent in that right from the start, he insisted that Germany must never in any circumstances fight a war on two fronts. That it never must go and fight against the combined strength of France, Britain and Russia. And therefore if Hitler has limited himself in the East and has

been further limited by the action of the Soviet Union, let us be quite clear that Hitler has done this in the East in order better to tackle his western adversaries without the intervention of any power in Eastern Europe.

He limits himself in the interests of avoiding a war on two fronts and in order to wage more effectively war against the west. And therefore we have got to see coming out of the settlement in Eastern Europe the Socialist power getting an extension of its territory, extending the territory of the Socialist revolution, and obviously increasing its diplomatic weight in the world. But on the other hand we are kidding ourselves if we don't equally see the increased fascist territory, new resources and a power to pursue fresh aggressions.

We see something in this document about the growth of the revolutionary forces in Germany. Revolutionary forces may be growing in Germany but the least likely opportunity that revolutionary forces have for making their presence felt is at the moment when a dictator country, flushed with military victory, is coming home with a certain amount of spoils; and therefore I cannot agree with any analysis that suggests that fascism, in emerging from a lightning war, with the industrial regions of Poland in its possession, has been in any way weakened. On the contrary it has been strengthened in relation to the Western powers by the acquisition of more population and more territory and more resources for waging a war. I cannot agree that the Nazis have simply and solely been forced to eat humble pie by the Soviet Union, as if they had been defeated in battle. Some limitation of their advance in Eastern Europe, some form of agreement with the Soviet Union in the Soviet-German Pact [was necessary], unless in the middle they wanted to tear it up, and once again engage in the two-front war which their whole policy is designed to avoid.

And here we come to the peace proposals and the British people. The fundamental fact that we must face with regard to these proposals is that the Nazi power has come out of the war in the East aggrandised. It has a larger army than the army of France and Britain combined. It

has probably at the present stage a larger air force than the air force of France and Britain combined. Its major aims as an imperialist power are unchanged. It is going along with these major aims. If it can achieve them by peace, it will achieve them by peace. If it can achieve them by purchasing a breathing space, which gives it the opportunity for a new lightning strike without the risk of a major war, it will seize that opportunity.

But it will be fatal for this Central Committee, or for any body of English people in this country, to believe for a single moment that the Nazi aims have been achieved, that the Nazi power has abandoned its aims to dominate the whole of Europe, that it is not, either by peace or war, resolutely bent on achieving these particular aims. On the other hand, France and Britain have reached that serious fiasco that Stalin warned them about last March. They have reached that serious situation that we warned them about for years, when Spain was a victim, when Czechoslovakia was a victim, the situation that by giving away resource after resource, strategic point after strategic point, in the last analysis they would be confronted with a victorious fascism and would have to face up to it alone.

I want to insist that it is not only French and British imperialism which is menaced by this situation, but the French and British peoples which are menaced by this situation. I cannot accept the thesis that the difference between fascism and democracy has lost its former significance. I think the difference between fascism and democracy retains its significance to the full, when armed fascism is in the field and is pushing forward relentlessly to acquire new territory and destroy democracy. Fascism today is facing the British and French peoples with nothing more or less than the complete destruction of their democratic institutions.

This is not a matter of rectifying a frontier. Not a matter of stealing a different colony here and there. Not a matter of reducing the power of the British Navy, but a matter of smashing the British and French peoples so that they cannot rise again, and smashing their democratic institutions in the process. And in that circumstance, when

fascism is threatening our people in such a way, we cannot have a line in which we proclaim that we are prepared to retreat before extraordinary fascist aggression. That it is a matter of no consideration for us to defend ourselves against extraordinary fascist aggression until in some way or other – we will come to that in a moment – we have got a revolutionary workers government in this country.

I consider that it is a lousy argument to argue that we must defend our democratic rights against the internal enemy, but to pursue in this war a policy of defeatism which could help the external enemy to triumph. Don't forget, comrades, the mistake of the German party from 1930 on. The German Party from 1930 on was banking on a Soviet Germany. It only saw one side of the picture. It could only see the growth of the forces of the Communist Party. It could not see the growth of, on the other hand, the fascist danger.

It pursued a line of isolating itself from the other labour and democratic forces in Germany and at the end it got not a Soviet Germany, but fascism. Don't let us, with a fascism which has not been militarily defeated or shaken, begin to see the perspective of the world revolution coming before fascism is defeated in the field, because if we have this perspective we will arrive at a situation when, in our search for the world revolution, we will get something far from being the world revolution, a possible extension of fascism with regard to us in Western Europe.

We have been told that the distinction between fascism and democracy has lost its former significance. We have seen its significance in the last few weeks. We have seen the profiteers on the home front, but we have seen the reaction to that. We have seen the firmer attitude in all the factories. We have seen the regrowth of activity of the labour movement. We have seen the action of the miners<sup>4</sup> shortly to be followed by the action of innumerable other sections. The vast wave of political discussion which has started all over the country. Never more has the distinction been so clear between a democratic country and the fascist country, than the distinction between the British workshop and the fascist workshop at the present time

since this war broke out.

Therefore, comrades, I think we ought to face the situation without any illusions. The defeat of France and Britain would be a mortal blow to the British working class movement. We are bound to see therefore, in our fight to replace capitalist democracy with socialist democracy, that we don't pursue tactics which will bring us to fascism. Again I say I am amazed when we have this picture of British imperialism as a raging lion, out for a new Treaty of Versailles, out to install a new German fascist government, out to make a new attack on the Soviet Union, when all the time the real attitude is that British imperialism and the British people are in the tightest jam they have ever been in in their history and tremendous difficulties are confronting them at the present time. We should be less scared of the bogey of a Versailles peace being imposed on Germany, and more scared of the bogey of a fascist peace of Versailles being imposed not on British imperialism but on the people of this country. All the evidence goes to show that French and British imperialism is on the defensive, and is badly rattled and demoralised. Therefore the possibilities before us are two. First the possibility of checking fascist aggression for a period, with the fight for a new government in France and Great Britain and the possibility on the basis of this new government, of opening new relations with the Soviet Union. And secondly, the possibility of a victory of the fascist aggressors in the west.

What we have to expose in my opinion is the latter danger. What we have to fight for is a position when we reach the former position of checking fascist aggression and preparing the way for a new government, and not to fool the British people with the spectacle of the victorious legions of Britain and France trampling all over Europe at the present time. And therefore it is from that point of view that I see our attitude to the peace proposals. I believe that we will put ourselves out of court before the British people, we will put ourselves out of court of being listened to by any body of people in this country, if we don't emerge, right from the start in this peace discussion,



as the deadly enemies of fascism, resolved not to allow fascism to conquer another foot of territory, resolved to extract guarantees from fascism before concluding this war.

Therefore to do as was done in Comrade Dutt's speech, to eliminate the fascist danger, to wave it away as something belonging to an old period, that is mad. 'Rip Van Winkles' who don't recognise that its elimination has been achieved were duly castigated. You may talk about transitions as much as you like, but your position is, on the basis of this line, that within a measurable period, a month or six weeks, you are making as clear to the people of this country that you are against this war, as you were making it clear to the people of this country that you were for this war, and were struggling for a new government in order to conduct this war. You come out on the basis that you are against this war. You are indifferent to the outcome of this war unless it is a revolutionary outcome. And you put yourself out of court as far as having any influence whatsoever on the peace proposals if they come forward before the British people. And it would simply be an act of unprecedented political treachery to the people of this country.

We have heard talk about how we will be judged at the bar of history. We will be judged at the bar of history, we who have shouted louder than any one else for the mobilisation of the people against fascist aggression: once fascist aggression has won its first decisive victory we pursue a line which will appear to the ordinary man, in spite of all sophistry, as if we are calling for a withdrawal from the struggle and surrender, almost 'peace at any price'. We cannot support any more calling off of the war without guarantees against fascist aggression in the west. The situation itself is no guarantee that fascist aggression has been checked. The situation itself is no guarantee that fascism is now going round hand-in-hand under the tutelage of the Soviet Union, and will now henceforth for ever more engage in no new acts of aggression.

There is no likelihood of anyone in this country accepting the proposition that we simply withdraw from

the war without at any rate guarantees against fascist aggression. One has only got to envisage such a situation, the recriminations that would take place, the defeatism, the splitting of France and Britain, the coming down by Mussolini to have his share of the booty in the last analysis and then a new stroke. We know the Hitler demagogy. We will hear it in the next day or two: 'We have no aims. We don't desire another foot of territory. We will guarantee France, and Britain and the British Empire. We have no further aims against anyone.' And then on that basis there will be the withdrawal from the struggle. And then in a few weeks a new act of aggression, when the forces have been demobilised and the civilian population of the democratic countries has been thoroughly and hopelessly demoralised by the situation.

For us to suggest for a single moment any more calling off of the war would be a descent from Marxism to Mosleyism.<sup>5</sup> We would be told that we were forgetting the role of the Soviet Union. I am not forgetting the role of the Soviet Union. But I am against presenting the role of the Soviet Union as a universal Santa Claus. I am against, in this new situation, smuggling in the idea that the Soviet Union is going to bring the chestnuts out of the fire in a new form. Have a peace talk and the Soviet Union will be there and it will engage in the necessary protection for you in Western Europe. That is chestnuts out of the fire in the most perverted form that it has ever been presented to this Central Committee. Therefore, as Gallacher rightly says, we must wait in a measure on developments. There is no peace proposal in front of us. There is the argument that Germany and the Soviet Union shall themselves, or through other channels, present proposals for bringing the war to a conclusion. They are not before us. They will be joint proposals. Not of the Soviet government. They will be joint proposals agreed upon by the two governments – that is, if there are going to be any definite proposals at all. Why should our line be a line of suggesting that such things should be accepted before we actually see and understand them and realise their full implications?

I think that our line should be that if a conference is called for, as distinct from a speech by Hitler over the Berlin Radio, if a conference is called for, we can have again the Three Power Conference of France, Britain and Germany or we cannot be against a Four power Conference which would include the Soviet Union: but if there is a Five Power Conference with Mussolini, we should agitate for the United States being brought into such a conference. But I say there is no proposal for a conference being brought forward at the present moment.

Therefore we should confine ourselves, in my opinion, to say what was said in the statement in the *Daily Worker* on Saturday. That we are for a settlement which gives us the guarantees in the west that the Soviet Union has achieved in the East, and propose, if the Soviet Union is willing – and it is none of our business to suggest it brings the chestnuts out of the fire – to link the guarantees in the East with the guarantees in the West. But it would be fatal for us to come away from the standpoint of resisting fascist aggression and not giving it another foot of territory and so on. Comrades, we have heard talk about this being an imperialist and an unjust war. It would be part of our business to watch any peace terms lest we become the protagonists of an imperialist and unjust peace. That is none of our business as a Communist Party.

On Poland itself I think we are entitled to propose, in our propaganda for peace terms, a plebiscite for the purely Polish districts of Poland. Why should we be in favour of self-determination for every country in the world but we cannot support a plebiscite for the Polish population to determine its own form of government and the possibilities of building up its own national life once again? I am not interested in arguments which go along the lines – you cannot do that because the Soviet Union's got a little part of Poland and Germany has got a big part of Poland, therefore you cannot demand a plebiscite or self-determination for the Polish people. I believe that is to take a standpoint of liberalism, away from the standpoint of Marxism, which is to propagate the class situation in Soviet Poland and Nazi Poland.

We are justified in demanding as a minimum a plebiscite for the Polish people. These are enough I believe to put forward at the present stage. Anything more – long lists drawing up of colonies, etc, that the Labour Party is proposing today – would be out of place, but I believe that we will only get the ear of the people for this line on the basis of our proclaimed anti-fascism. On the basis of our willingness to resist fascist aggression while fighting against any imperialist aims directed against the German people. Obscure that basis of the fight on two fronts and you will be indistinguishable in a very short time from the filthy rabble of Trotskyists, Pacifists, the 5th Columnists in this country.

And comrades, when you are making a change of tactics, it is not good business to liquidate all the past gains over the past period. We have to get all the advantages we have had with the co-operation with the labour forces and democratic forces in this country, in order to avoid a prolongation of the war for imperialist aims and the struggle for a peace with security.

Now the rigid carrying out of the line of the short Thesis, and the rigid carrying out of the line of this resolution and of Comrade Springhall's report, would draw the line in this country in the following fashion: those who are for the war for whatever reason on one side, which includes not only the imperialists but 99% of the labour and democratic elements in this country; and on the other side, the Trotskyists, the pacifists, the fascists and ourselves. That is how the line will be drawn, on the line of this document and on the line of the short Thesis. We want to draw the line in another way. We want to draw the line between those who are for the war until Fascist aggression is checked and those who are for an imperialist war of dismemberment. Comrade Gallacher was perfectly correct. The line of the short Thesis, the line of this document, is the line of avoiding the struggle for a new government. It is the line of having no co-operation with labour and democratic forces on any issue connected with this war, to rely on the possibility of capitalism, war weariness, exhaustion and defeat creating the possibilities for a revolution in this country.

It may be, comrades, that war weariness, exhaustion and

defeat will create the possibilities for a revolution in this country. But whoever could capitalise on the possibility of a revolution in this country, it is doubtful if it can be capitalised on if our party had shown itself, in all the period of the struggle, indifferent to the danger of external fascism, indifferent to the reality of the fascist menace.

Comrades are saying when the war comes and people get exhausted, there will be a new feeling, a feeling against the war. I think it is all psychology. I think as the situation gets difficult, as the people of this country get up against it, the feeling will rise not against the war, but will rise 100 per cent against fascism, against all who have supported fascism in this country, against all those who have brought fascism to the menacing position in which it is today. Against Chamberlain who covered up fascism and its development in all his speeches. That is how the feeling will rise as the war situation develops, and we are being asked to divorce ourselves from that feeling, to abandon the line of anti-fascism, and come out on the line of being purely and simply against British imperialism, presented in the guise of an all-conquering world factor out to lick the universe and so on.

Therefore I feel the line of the fight for a new future government is correct. It is the line that enables us to continue to expose this government, and discredit and demote those who have helped to build up German fascism. It is a line which enables us to seize on the anti-fascist feeling, not only to defend democracy but to extend democracy in this country. It is the line in which we seize on the willingness of the masses to fight against fascism as the basis for fighting for the improvement of the conditions of the masses. But if we imagine for a single moment that a proportion of the labour and democratic forces being won over to a position of the resistance to external fascist aggression is no longer a matter of supreme moment for the people of this country, this would not only mean a weakening of the resistance to external fascism, it would mean the splitting of those forces that we must rely upon to prevent fascist developments in this country.

It would give the banner of the defence of democracy

into the hands of the men of Munich. It would give the banner of the defence of democratic rights into the hands of the men of Munich. It would rehabilitate them and the forces around them. It would make impossible the advance of the people of this country in the direction of the overthrow of capitalism. Just think of it. The reactionaries of this country have built up fascism and bungled us into war, and we who have fought against fascism and war hand over to them the title of being the defenders of the British people, and go on showing ourselves indifferent to resistance to fascist aggression.

Is it going to be any easier for people in the workshops to defend the workers' interests – people who have always been known as people against any advance of Hitler – if they are now going to come out with the line that a Hitler victory as far as they are concerned is a matter of indifference, that we have to work for a revolution in this country, that the only alternative to the Chamberlain government is a revolutionary government in this country? That is the alternative, comrades, because on the basis of this line, a Labour and democratic government would not only be no better than the Chamberlain government but, on the basis of this line, it would be worse than the Chamberlain government. It would be a Labour and democratic government, a pack of filthy traitors selling the British people. And therefore we have the Chamberlain government or the Churchill government or any type of government until the forces of revolution have developed and we – on the basis of guidance of the interim line, because there is none here – will have assembled the forces of this country for a new revolutionary government.

I say that we are risking the possibility of new people and new forces coming forward in this country and gaining the results of all the work that we have been doing in recent years, that we are liquidating and giving up all the aims and all the things that we have been doing in the whole existence of our Party. Let us have no illusions on this score of a revolutionary workers' government. Fascism has gained many footholds in the last few years. It is unshaken in the field. The German workers may be

developing and struggling against it, but so long as the great military police machine holds, so long as it is able to draw on new economic resources, so long as the workers are split up and the movement honeycombed with spies, revolution against an unbeaten fascist dictatorship will not be easy. In fact history has shown us few examples of revolutions against successful military dictatorships, and therefore if you want revolutions in this country or in any other country you must have a line which is a line of smashing the counter-revolution in Europe, fascism, while at the same time driving against the elements in your own country, namely the line of two fronts.

Therefore I suggest that the way out of the situation in which we find ourselves is simply to define our aims in the broadest principles, a check to fascist aggression in the West, a plebiscite in Poland, await the coming out of more concrete peace terms; if they come, to make it clear that we are for the unity of the labour and democratic forces around a series of democratic war aims, and we are for a government that will fight to realise these war aims, and that will negotiate for these war aims, and will fight for any possibilities which come at a peace conference of security and peace, for a period at any rate, for the people of this country. All the rest from that is barren negation. Smuggle out the government, smuggle out the idea of the unity of the Labour and democratic forces for these aims and you have nothing left except propagandist activity explaining the character of the war and hoping that the spontaneous movement of the masses will bring things in your direction.

Therefore I believe that the line of the fight on two fronts is the line of moving forward to the new situation, the line of keeping the leadership of this Party intact, the line of preserving the gains of the past. It will be foolish in my opinion to abandon this line at the present time. In the meantime I also hope that this document will be scrutinised and scrutinised again. It tells us Chamberlain is out to destroy Hitler and bring in a government in Germany subservient to British imperialism, and in another part of the same document, 'Chamberlain is the best ally of Hitler'. It tells us in one part of the document

that the aim of British imperialism is not to defeat Hitler, and in another part tells us how it is war to the end, to smash the people's revolution in Germany.

So far have you got along this line that Comrade Dutt seriously quotes this morning speculation from Amsterdam as to the possibility of the Nazis staging a Communist revolution in Germany as one of the possibilities arising out of the co-operation of the Soviet Union and Germany, the possibility of a Communist transformation of Germany carried out by Hitler and the Nazi Party. That quotation is seriously presented to us from *The Times* as being one of the great dangers that the bourgeoisie in this country are trembling about at the present time.

Therefore I ask the comrades seriously to consider keeping to the line of the fight on two fronts, with all the necessary adaptations, and not to go to this complete swing which is not only a complete revolution in our tactics but is not the way to fight the new situation, in which there is a war between two imperialisms, one of which has democratic institutions and the other which is an out and out fascist imperialism, the enemy of democracy and intent on installing the fascist system throughout the world. That is the new situation. The formulas of the past are not the formulas of those who are talking about the 7th Congress. The formulas of the past are those which Comrade Dutt dug out from his studies of the war of 1914.

I suggest that we should adhere to the old line, make all the necessary adaptations, preserve the unity of the leadership and go forward.

### Notes

1. Campbell is referring to the views of the Comintern and CPSU leaderships.
2. Newspaper of the CPSU. Campbell was referring to its editorial of 30.9.39, published in the *Daily Worker* of 2.10.39.
3. Newspaper of the Soviet Government. Campbell was referring to an editorial article of 30.9.39, published in the *Daily Worker* of 2.10.39.
4. In September 1939 miners all over Britain opposed attempts to increase hours or lower wages, and won a number of concessions.
5. Mosleyism was indigenous British fascism, after the founder and leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980).



## *Finlay Hart*

I accept the thesis which has been presented to us, without any qualifications, but I am very worried about the way that the matter has been presented here today and the speeches of the other two comrades. All of us have got to appreciate our responsibility in arriving at decisions which we have been brought up very sharply against in the telegram. In view of these circumstances we require very, very carefully to examine the whole position, to see how we can now make a turn and how we can proceed with carrying out the new line. I am very worried in this sense. When Comrade Dutt speaks he puts it in a form that you will accept or else. And while I appreciate the need for the utmost unity in the Party, I don't think this is the way in which we are going to get it, if there are threats accompanying it.

I appreciate also that unity will be necessary, but it will not be very easy to convince the Party when they find such leading comrades as those who have already spoken are opposed. There are many comrades in the Party who are in the same position as I have been, and probably still am, in the sense that I have the utmost respect for these comrades and would not under any circumstances in normal times have pitted my judgement against theirs after their years of experience. But this is something which we have to appreciate in this Party, the loyalty of Party members. But what worries me more, in the sense in which it has been advanced, is the way in which an old and tried comrade like Gallacher allows himself to be provoked, and does not help me or other comrades in his contributions to indicate where he disagrees. He does not deal with the thesis, nor does he indicate where his differences are,

merely to say he will accept it with reservations.

**Gallacher** – (interjection) Did you not hear me say that I still believe Nazi aggression had to be checked? Did I not make it as clear as anything?

**Hart** – But as for the speech which was made by Comrade Campbell, I hope there will be no other speeches made at this Central Committee in such a way as he made that speech, because I feel, and get this whole sort of sense from his speech, that all his arguments are being used in order to cover up what is for him support of British imperialism. That is what I can take out of the whole of his argument, in the sense that he speaks about a differentiation between fascism and democracy and does not, I think, correctly interpret what it actually says within the resolution itself, because it says that the differentiation between fascist and so-called democratic states has lost its former significance. I believe this is correct in the sense that none of us are under any illusions as to the difference between fascism and democracy and we are conducting a fight in this country.

I believe it is along the lines finally of this resolution that we will conduct the successful fight against fascism. When he talks in terms that confuse the democratic and fascist states with our acceptance of the difference between fascism and communism, I just don't see what Comrade Campbell is getting at because we have always had and still say that there are strong pro-fascist tendencies within the government of this country. None of us has been under any illusions as to the role of British imperialism, how it had since 1933 been the defender of fascist Germany. Now we find that it is in a position wherein the British government is caught in the meshes of its own policy in the sense that it has been the instigator of war. This is clearly shown in the way that Comrade Stalin presents it at the 18th Congress. So in these circumstances we find that whether one is the accessory after the fact or the aggressor, there is very little difference between the two

states, although there are differences in the sense that democracy is within one country or certain sections, and fascism is within the other.

Now can we visualise that it is our holy duty as a British working class to relieve the German people of fascism, or to create those conditions in which the German people will relieve themselves of fascism, at the same time as we will guarantee that fascism is not imposed upon us? It is from this point of view that I think that, taking everything into account, the line of the manifesto is correct, but it does raise for me a number of very big problems. I am under no illusion, it will be very difficult within the Party to get an acceptance of this line. True if we had a united Central Committee there would be absolutely no difficulties whatever. At least very little difficulty if we had a united C.C. But from the speeches that I have heard, none of us can be under any illusion there will be a very grave division within this meeting. In these circumstances I visualise that we are faced with very big difficulties and in view of these circumstances, when the decision is taken, one thing this Party must be very careful about, is that it does not under any circumstances separate itself from the working class movement.

Now I have already had one experience which has been referred to by Comrade Dutt, and it was replied to by Comrade Gallacher. Perhaps I could get in between and make a little further explanation of the incident which took place at the Political Bureau. We were discussing what statement should appear in the *Daily Worker* and there was the formulation drawn up by Comrade Gallacher, the formulation which I agreed with, in the sense that it was understandable and would be appreciated by the workers who had been following our line. But there was an insistence on the part of other comrades that we have the one line or the other. I interrupted to indicate that I was not clear, but a vote was being taken, that is in the sense of the particular formulation, when everybody should have been agreed that it was necessary to modify a public statement. And if we can get into a position like this in the Party ...

**Campbell** – (interjection) Any vote taken was for or against putting the document in the *Daily Worker*.

**Hart** – The vote was as to whether we would accept this particular formulation. Here we have a position which is a dangerous one, from the point of view that I accept this, but am very concerned about its application, in that we are using the old line to try and modify the application of the new line. I am concerned that we can get so far ahead of the British workers that this complete *volte face* that we will make will result in complete misunderstanding and isolate us from the mass of the workers. In view of these circumstances we have to be very careful that we take the step in accordance with the drive amongst the working class to help them to understand this line, and not merely by making pronouncements to them.

So what is the first step? The first step, although it presents difficulties and will present many more difficulties than it has already presented, in that we want and cannot make public statements which are correctly on the line, our first job is to get our own Party clear, and as united as possible. On the basis of that that our line would more and more come out from the ranks of the working class itself in the pronouncements which would be made by other organisations supporting the pronouncements which the Party would make, because the isolation of the Party in the present period would be a serious thing for the British working class movement, never mind the Communist Party.

In view of these circumstances, I want to put it that one of the first things that we have to concern ourselves with is suggested in the manifesto. Beginning now to expose the imperialist role we shall have opportunities on this question of the fight for peace. If there are possibilities of us advancing certain proposals and not merely lagging at the tail of any other proposals being made, then we should advance these proposals, because I believe that it is on the basis of the fight for peace that we are going to bring down the government. It will have a tremendous support in the sense that we give the attention to the respective social

questions that are giving so much concern to the masses of the workers at the present time.

**Gallacher** – (interjection) You are for us putting forward proposals for peace that you think will bring down the government. Do you propose another government to put forward the proposals?

**Hart** – I was going to go on to make the point that there are difficulties, in that the Soviet Union is operating a particular line of policy, and the Soviet Union will be a party to peace proposals which we don't know about. But it is essential that we be getting some idea across that these difficulties can be settled, and why I am so concerned about this is that I believe that all that we have said in the past is correct, that fascism means war. If a settlement is arrived at, that is in the sense that we have in the position in the East, I am not the least bit afraid of what a military defeat would do to this country or to France. I am positive that the British and French people will take the necessary steps to preserve their working-class government, if there is one, or institute, on the basis of their own defeat, a working-class government. But on the basis of these peace proposals, whatever they may be, and our fight for them, fascism could not live within present circumstances on the basis of peace.

How has Hitlerism been able to continue since 1933? On the basis of the continual increase in its prestige as a result of its military advance. Stop that, and there you have ripe the economic conditions within Germany which would bring about the downfall of Hitler. In view of the fact that the fight for peace is of an all-embracing character, the final point I would again make is to try and discuss this matter in a way which will leave the utmost unity within this Party. We can approach the membership and approach the workers without it being evident that there has taken place within the British Communist Party such a split that will be hailed by the capitalist press – there would be rejoicing in every paper, and it would render a great disservice to the British working class movement.

## *Hymie Lee*

We have to face the fact that there was a new world situation and we did not see it. I do not think it would help at all to speak about faithful servants of the International or anything like that, when we have to admit that we did not see this situation. We were told about it. It was a very sudden change in the situation. We were told about it but through clinging to old analysis and old conceptions we failed to change in accordance with the changed circumstances. As a matter of fact the manifesto of the Party on the eve of the ultimatum about war was published simultaneously with Molotov's speech in the *Daily Worker*, and in that speech he tells about the change in the situation.

There must have been something to which we had to give very great attention when on three occasions in that speech Molotov spoke about the great historical significance of the Soviet-German Pact and the tremendous importance of the day of the signing of the Pact in general history. But the manifesto and our subsequent support of it, and my contribution last week, showed that we clung absolutely to the old conception of the situation and based ourselves in this new situation on tactics that no longer applied.

Now there was a contradiction in the manifesto, and I said last week that a lot of discussion was going on in the Party during the past few weeks. There was the contradiction which was pointed out this morning, that one front cancelled out the other. So far as I am concerned I tried to solve that contradiction by digging up parallels which did not apply. Now the contradiction is that we were fighting against what we consider Nazi aggression and fascism, which we did not want imposed in this country,

and at the same time we were fighting the home government. In the logic of events by fighting the home government we were fighting against any fight against fascism. That contradiction kept creeping up. It is true we put forward the point of view about change in the government, but it meant objectively that we were wholly supporting the war as being a demand from all sides, when we thought about the situation, and I believe that thought is necessary and every one of us must have thought a great deal since last week.

There was the contradiction, and it led to a position of supporting the war. This brings us to trying to get an understanding of what the character of the war is and that is the big question that we have to decide today and we cannot get away from it. We would be failing in what is our Communist duty if we try to escape from the job of deciding what this war is. Because of our adherence to a position which had been outlived, we failed to see that all the characteristics of the war made it an imperialist war. As a matter of fact you can read what Lenin said in 1914 about imperialist war, and all the same features are presenting themselves. But there is the great factor in favour of the working class which did not exist in 1914, and that is the existence of the Soviet Union.

Now I want to touch upon the points which have been raised with regard to the fact that we have not appreciated the diminishing, the almost disappearance, of the difference between the fascist regime and the so-called democratic regime. We are up against the situation now that in France the Communist Party is dissolved and made illegal, and this is the government that is 'supposed to be fighting a fascism, where the Communists are suppressed. We cannot hold this position at all. We have to choose therefore between a fascism which is suppressing the Communist Party in France and a fascism that is prepared to make a pact with the Soviet Union.

**Campbell** – (interjection) Have they already got fascism in France?

**Lee** – They have suppressed the Communist Party, dissolved it, suppressed its leaders and its newspapers, because they understand very well that the Communist Party would go on to the line of revolutionary struggle against the war. On the other hand the situation has changed and it seems to me that we must readily admit the possibilities of the factor of change. The changes have taken place, and we would be in a very stupid position if, when faced up with a whole series of arguments and facts, we did not accept the fact that a change has taken place. The change is that we have Germany in contact and with a pact with the Soviet Union, and Britain and France against having a pact with the Soviet Union and suppressing the Communist Party and the working class movement. This forces us to see whole changes in the situation.

Now the Soviet-German Pact was the defeat of British imperialist policy. That is another fact which may be we have not appreciated sufficiently in so far as we ourselves have been saying that it was British imperialism's policy to build up Hitler and to attack the Soviet Union. The Soviet-German Pact was the defeat of British imperialist policy. I think we should put it more sharply like that. We have made a very one-sided explanation that it was the defeat of Nazi policy, a defeat of Nazi aggressive plans. It was the defeat of British imperialist policy, the fact that the Soviet-German Pact showed that it was no longer possible for Britain to direct Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union in connection with this situation, and the leaders of the Soviet Union, have explained why they had to come to this situation. They have been dealing with these changes which we have failed to recognise. For example, in the speech of Molotov it says that when the British delegation began to realise that a pact of military assistance would in some measure strengthen the Soviet Union, they would have nothing to do with it. We have not drawn the conclusion from this. The British imperialists, when they thought the slightest gain was to be gained by the Soviet Union, swept it on one side and the result has been the war. Therefore it was a mistake on my part to try



and make some balance of the responsibilities for the war, and we are coming to the position, and Party members are coming to the position, that the people responsible for the war are the British and French imperialists.

**Stewart** – (interjection) You mean leave Germany out of the picture. In that case the German workers would not want to defeat the Nazis.

**Lee** – Last week I said in supporting the policy of the fight on two fronts, in what seemed to be a very complicated situation, that there was less responsibility on British imperialism than upon the German fascist aggression. There is equal responsibility in the sense that so far as we are concerned British imperialism is responsible for the war. They have plunged the peoples of this country into war, when they had the opportunity very clearly explained and demonstrated and accepted by progressive peaceful people of maintaining peace. We have to face up to that situation and face up to the situation that the war is contrary to the interests of the working class.

The things that happened since the war are contrary to the interests of the working class. The whole character of the emergency regulations. Rising prices. The Budget. The ruin of the middle class, the black-out arrangements, all this is contrary to the interests of the working class. As we help the working class and the working class itself sees through the fog which has been created owing to the slogans which have existed in this war, they will see that the war is contrary to the interests of the working class.

We have made a mistake. It is very difficult, but I think that the resolution that is proposed from the Comintern is a correct one and it is helping us to remedy our position. It has forced us to think about the situation. We are not going to be in the position of being without this advice, and from that point of view I have to say that Comrade Dutt was right last week and not me. This position that we have been in has put us in the position of lagging behind

the situation. People do not want the war. They want to fight against restrictions on their liberty, but they wanted to maintain peace. That is why they voted in the test ballot for the Anglo-Soviet Pact.

Last Tuesday in the morning after we had the discussion, in the *News Chronicle* 90 per cent of the letters which were being received were defeatist letters, and wherever you go now you find this feeling that something should be done about the war. Of course the imperialists now are developing this rabid anti-Soviet campaign. Already this morning in a little village in Cumberland they wrecked the NUWM club because it was the centre of Bolshevik propaganda. This is the imperialists showing their face in the present war.

**Gallacher** – (interjection) Would they attack Churchill<sup>1</sup> on the speech he made last night?

**Lee** – I don't know. Maybe if we explained things properly they will attack Churchill instead of us. We are lagging behind the situation. I don't know what the situation is in other districts, but comrades are asking what is the policy of the Party.

The statements during the week following on last week's meeting, through the concentration on the issues on the home front, raised the questions. Wednesday's Editorial in the *Daily Worker* was an editorial for losing the war. The editorial was headed 'No Class Collaboration', which really now as we understand it urged the trade union movement not to participate in any war committees with regard to increase of production etc. This was a policy for not helping the government to win the war, and yesterday's statement has also given rise to a whole series of questions about our policy. I think we ought to get clear and put forward a definite and determined line based upon the resolution.

Comrade Molotov opens out in his speech that some people in the Soviet Union were victims of an

over-simplified anti-fascist propaganda and I believe that is what we have suffered from. We have fallen into some kind of simplification of the situation. I want to say that trying to justify what we accepted to be a correct line is why I fell into these errors which Comrade Dutt so sharply outlined today, and I don't think we can take it in any personal fashion. There are very big issues being decided now, with big historical movements being set in motion, and we cannot worry so much about the personal effect of a criticism or an attack on a point of view. We are trying to get into line with the line of international communism and I think it is quite right for Dutt to show exactly where we can land if we don't put ourselves on to the right line. I also think it will be possible, if we get clear, to convince the Party membership that it is necessary to pursue this policy. It will strengthen the Party with its strong clear line of opposition to the war and utilising the situation created for developing the revolutionary working class movement.

The situation in the factories and in the mines is one of being concerned about their conditions. The war has become a kind of interruption of the developing anti-Chamberlain anti-capitalist movement in this country, and we want now to correct ourselves so that we can go forward to defeat British imperialism. This is what we have to be deeply concerned about. We take too much a one-sided point of view. We don't think of the other side. Of what happens if British imperialism gets defeated. It is an imperialism which oppresses colonial people. It would be a tremendous advantage to them and to us too if this imperialism was defeated, but owing to the fact that we didn't get clear on the new factors in the situation, didn't see the great changes and the influence of the Soviet Union, which is consistent with our own interests in the new situation, we clung to this old line and made these terrible mistakes, and I say that I accept this resolution and will fight for it in the Party.

*Note*

1. Gallacher is referring to the broadcast made on 1 October 1939 by Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill considered that the USSR had checked Hitler's ambitions in the East by its invasion of Eastern Poland.

## *Maurice Cornforth*

I am speaking here at this continuation of the meeting with some diffidence because I feel that it is a serious thing, for me personally and for other members of the Central Committee who are taking the same line, to change one's mind very radically in the course of a single week. This means that I want to speak in support of the line which Comrade Dutt has been putting forward here.

I would just like to indicate what made me personally get into a position of so quickly turning political somersaults in common with other comrades. The reason is, first, the report which Comrade Springhall gave at the conclusion of the last meeting. I feel that whatever one's immediate reactions to that might be, the fact that from the International comes a line so contradictory to what we had been saying inevitably shakes one up in the sense of revaluing everything which one has been saying and thinking.

But, chiefly, when the news came through of the further actions of the Soviet Union, the very definite statement which they had made with regard to peace, saying that if the war was continued the responsibility would be upon Britain and France – and therefore not only on the governments but upon any political section in Britain and France which favoured the continuation of the war – it seemed to me absolutely obvious that we had got to go into a position fully in accord with what the Soviet Union was standing for.

We had to criticise very roughly and go over all the ideas we had had which had put us in the position where such things coming from the Soviet Union had been something of a surprise and something of a shock. Perhaps it sounds

rather silly in some ways to have oneself in the position where when the Soviet Union does something one is willing constantly at first, while thinking it over, to follow what the Soviet Union is doing, but I must say that I personally have got that sort of faith in the Soviet Union, to be willing to do that, because I believe that if one loses anything of that faith in the Soviet Union one is done for as a Communist and Socialist. I remember very distinctly being very impressed by something Comrade Pollitt said at a Party Congress in which he made the statement about the Soviet Union, that they can do no wrong and it seemed to me at the time that this was rather a funny statement to make. But the fact of the matter is that a socialist state, I believe, in that position, can do no wrong, and is doing no wrong, and this is what we have to stick to, so these are the reasons why personally I commenced to turn political somersaults, because that is what it means.

Now I just want to say something on the arguments which Comrade Campbell has put up at this meeting. I think Comrade Campbell made a very courageous sort of speech, but the arguments which he put up at this meeting failed altogether to impress me at the present time, although last week I was very impressed and very much convinced by what Comrade Campbell then said. These are some of the points which occurred to me out of that.

First of all, the fact that on account of the position that he was taking up Comrade Campbell had to launch a broad-side attack on the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. *Izvestia* and *Pravda* are the papers of these organisations, and Comrade Campbell, as I understood it, launched a broad-side attack in the most scathing terms on what was being said in these papers. It seems to me that the probability is that these papers are on the right lines. And furthermore that if we follow Comrade Campbell's line we find ourselves in a position of not wanting immediate peace but wanting the continuation of the war, despite the very firm warning which has been given by the Soviet Government and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and if we read it carefully, the same thing is given in Molotov's speech, that

people who want this sort of thing are rabid warmongers and all the rest of it.

Then there is the argument which Comrade Campbell has used about democracy and fascism. As I understand it the position is this. Of course the distinction between democracy and fascism has lost none of its significance and of course we fight for democracy against all attempts of fascism to overthrow our democracy, but what Comrade Dutt said, or rather what the Executive Committee of the Communist International said, was that the role of the democratic powers and the fascist powers on a world scale has lost its significance, and that is an entirely different statement from saying that the distinction between democracy and fascism has lost its significance.

Then what Comrade Campbell said about the demarcation line which we can draw. He said that the demarcation line which he thinks we ought to have, this is what I understood him to mean, is between those people who are for war until fascist aggression is checked and those people who are for war for imperialist domination. It seems to me that when one really honestly tries to think this out, and I must say in my own thoughts thinking it over this week I have been trying to draw such a demarcation line, it is a demarcation line which is no demarcation line.

If we allowed ourselves to become the people who are for war until fascist aggression is checked, etc, then we are getting into the Labour Party position of being a loyal opposition supporting a number of the measures which the government is taking, and at the same time making all sorts of criticisms, etc. Consequently it seems to me that the demarcation line business is very bad, and while Comrade Campbell warns about the line which Comrade Dutt takes as leading toward being a 5th Column, and Trotskyism, and so on, it seems to me that one also has to consider the warning with regard to the line Comrade Campbell takes, which is going to lead us into the position of being Greenwoods and people of this description.

And then there is the further question about the allies which we are going to have. It seems to me clear that we

have to take a line on the basis of the facts, and what the Soviet Union is doing, and the analysis which we can reach, and if that lands us into saying things similar to what the ILP was saying a fortnight ago, we must not be prejudiced by that, because we will find sure enough that if we start saying different things now, I don't believe for a moment that we are going to get into agreement with the ILP and Trotskyists, they will be on some other tack altogether.

Then there is another argument which Comrade Campbell used, about counting on the exhaustion which people will feel after a time as a result of the war, and turning this into imperialist channels. Comrade Campbell said that such war exhaustion is more likely to mean the increase of feeling against fascism which will be a very good thing. But I think one also has to point out that if the war exhaustion is exploited in this way of giving rise entirely to a rise of feeling against German fascism, it will equally be exploited into a rise of feeling against the Soviet Union and all the rest of it, as the friend of German fascism, and therefore we have to be very careful about arguments of this sort.

But Comrade Campbell is quite right in this respect, that should we get ourselves into a position of saying 'Oh well, we will wait till everyone is fed up with the war and then we will be able to strike', such a line is hopeless, and is not contained in the resolution proposed. Because of course our line must be to fight for all we are worth against all the horrible things connected with this war and to defend for all we are worth the interests of the people in this war. Just finally this point. Comrade Campbell developed this argument about the terrible situation that arises in the event of a victory for German fascism. I have been developing this argument to myself during the last week and how it strikes me is this, and I could not avoid having this feeling when I thought of these arguments, that precisely the same arguments could have been used in 1914, and were used, with regard to the horrible things which would happen to us in the event of Germans defeating us and sure enough had they defeated us the most horrible things would have happened to us.

But this does not mean to say that because of these things



we are in favour of fighting with our own imperialism for a victory over German fascism, because, in such a situation as this, one has got to have an international line. I am not saying that Comrade Campbell is overlooking this, realising that whilst we are fighting against our imperialists in such war, the German workers are fighting against their imperialists, and it is the imperialist line which was the essence of the position taken up by Lenin in 1914.

Therefore it seems to me that in relation to a lot of these arguments which Comrade Campbell uses, one has to evaluate them from this point of view. For all these sorts of reasons I find Comrade Campbell's arguments this week very unconvincing. Although there is one thing which Comrade Campbell said which I do believe is of very great importance. That is about the lessons in connection with the peace – we have to be very careful not to be reckoning about the Soviet Union somehow or other making a nice peace for us, but to recognise the line which we have to take. I think Comrade Campbell was quite right in stressing that, and this is the thing, if and when this new line is adopted, we have to be careful about, because a new chestnuts business could easily come up as Comrade Campbell has clearly pointed out.

But anyway in the light of these things, in the light of the analysis which has been made, in the light of the action of the Soviet Union, it does seem to me that Comrade Campbell and other comrades are trying somehow or other to take some sort of a middle course, to make changes because we have to recognise something has got to be changed, while sticking to the main essence of our former line. It seems to me that the speeches which have been made show that there cannot be any middle course in the situation. The fact of the matter is there is a new sort of era opened up and we have to revalue everything which we are doing.

On the aims which British imperialism has got in this war. We undoubtedly should have been more on to this previously and I think we have to realise that what is happening now is a continuation of the Munich line of

British imperialism, which in the new circumstances has become very greatly transformed. As has been pointed out very often, the whole essence of Munich was not only appeasement, it was with the object of directing the forces against the Soviet Union, and this object has, as we know, received the most terrible blow through the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact and further developments. Consequently it seems to be the case that British imperialism, still with its reactionary motives of domination and attack upon the Soviet Union, is trying now to fight against German fascism with the object of weakening them and of conniving to impose upon the German people, of having that British domination in Europe which they have so long worked for, which will fundamentally be able to turn the war against the Soviet Union. There was one thing in the speech of Comrade Ercoli at the 7th World Congress which Comrade Dutt was quoting last week, and it is important to re-read it. In it he points out that any war in the present situation inevitably begins to be transformed into a war against the Soviet Union.

Without a doubt our imperialists are still trying to do that, and such being the policy of British imperialism it seems to me to become very obvious that we have got to oppose that policy of British imperialism for all we are worth, and to work against supporting any such war which British imperialism is engaged in for these objects. We have got to have this outlook, that we here on this front of the working class struggle have got to cope with British imperialism. The German people are coping with German imperialism. The position of German imperialism, of German fascism, has become as a result of the actions of the Soviet Union very much weakened indeed, so that it is true that their position of being the spearhead in the way in which they were before has changed – as a spearhead they have been blunted.

The question about peace. It appears to me that in view of the latest development, the definite statement which has been made by the Soviet Government in conjunction with the German government which has created such a profound impression in this country, we should now come

out as a Party very, very strongly in favour of peace. It is perfectly true that we don't know at the present time exactly what peace terms are being proposed or even who is going to propose them. We have got to think this out very carefully what sort of a peace we want and if we get such a peace, what is going to happen and what our further line is going to be. But I believe that any question of waiting and seeing is wrong, that with this lead from the Soviet Union we have to come out very strongly in favour of ending this war, pointing out what the devil are we fighting for and in favour of the conclusion of peace. I believe it is the case that there was a big feeling at the beginning, that every one was willing to undertake anything, to stick anything, for the sake of defeating German fascism, but the later developments, when it is becoming clear that we are not really fighting against German fascism, has damped down a very great deal of this.

People are fed up with the present position and the whole war position, and this struggle for peace will meet with a very big response at the present time from the British people. We have had a little experience of that even during the last week. At a large meeting at Letchworth on Saturday where our comrade who is in charge there took a line of his own, different from the line in the *Daily Worker*, and came out very strongly in connection with peace and the Soviet proposals, this had a very big response and very little opposition from quite a large meeting. I have had the same thing in talking to one or two people. I think we have to be very careful about proposals such as Comrade Campbell makes, for instance in regard to the Polish plebiscite, because if we are going to come out with this sort of thing and say we will only have peace now on the basis of the restoration of the German part of Poland, the restoration of Czechoslovakia, Austria and all the rest of it, it is very difficult because these are objects which we want and they are not going to give up.

We have to be careful lest in making these things conditions at the present moment for the conditions of peace, we are not playing the game of our own imperialist

government which is going for all sorts of democratic and anti-fascist sounding reasons for continuing a war. It does not follow that by conducting the war ostensibly for the oppressed parts of Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, we are actually serving the interests of the people who are being oppressed there, so I feel a little bit doubtful about it.

About the government. Comrade Gallacher raises the question 'you say in this resolution down with the Chamberlain government, what are we going to put in its place?' Comrade Gallacher asks this question very rightly and we have to face up to it. And I believe that the position is this. It has not always been a principle of Communist revolutionary tactics that in saying down with a particular government we have to put it right out that some other government could be put in its place which we would support. It seems to me that the position now is that we have no immediate possibility of a government of the sort which we would support, because whatever coalition of leading political figures one might put into the government at the present time from the ranks of the parliamentary parties, this is still bound to be full of chauvinism and imperialism and people that we cannot support. Therefore it seems to me that the situation is now such that the slogan of a people's government is not a slogan that is immediately applicable.

Our fight has rather got to be, and this it seems to me logically follows from the line which is being put forward, our fight has rather got to be for the mobilisation of mass action against imperialism and imperialist aims, whatever government may be representing British imperialism at the time. That does not mean to say that one government may not be better than another, but I cannot see the possibility at the present time of putting forward any government in a practical way of the sort that we would be able to support. This means we are in a position of fighting against any government, and the slogan of a people's government is a slogan which we still put forward as a matter of propaganda, and explaining what we have to be working for as a long term aim, but not as a matter of

immediate policy. If we put forward slogans about a people's government as an immediate policy then I think we will discredit ourselves and the people's government.

Then just one thing which arises from the fight which I think we have to wage in connection with peace. And that is, who are our allies going to be? If we face up to the position which arises from the line which has now been put forward, it does become clear, and Comrade Campbell is absolutely right in bringing this out sharply, that we have got to be prepared to work to some extent in alliance with the pacifists about whom we have been so freezing and aggressive in the period of the fight for the peace front. This is something which follows and we have to face up to it. I was informed yesterday, at a discussion which we were having in Cambridge around the question of the Cambridge Peace Council, that the pacifists there are now coming out strongly now in support of the stand which the Soviet Union has been taking. That seems to indicate that this is a matter where we will find ourselves co-operating with the pacifists. It is not of course the same thing as agreeing with them or refraining from criticising them. I don't believe this means co-operation with the Trotskyists or the ILP because I am certain they will be taking another line, a line based on anti-Soviet slanders.

Then I just want to say what I think about the part of Comrade Dutt's report where he speaks about the mass issues about food and all the rest of it. This is something which is going to be a main line of the fight and I think also in connection with ARP you have to be very clear that, imperialist war or not, we are in favour of people being protected from having bombs dropped on them and that therefore we fight for ARP because the imperialists are interested in carrying on the war for its own sake, and it is our job to protect the people.

Then just about the labour movement. It seems to me that what we have to do is this. We have a lot of connection with local Labour Parties, and these connections must be strengthened and not be broken. We have to do all we can, and I believe that we can do a hell of a lot, to rally the local organisations of the Labour Party where these organi-

sations have stopped meeting, and gone into decay because of the war, to revive them and to get them going again on the basis of a fight for peace and a fight for the protection of the interests and well-being of the British people, and against the central policy of the leadership of the Labour Party. This I believe, and some of our comrades are finding it so already, will meet with a response in the ranks of the Labour Party. This is what we have to do, and we have to be operating that carefully because we know when we change our line lots of comrades jump. We have to be careful that we don't have a coming-up again of sectarian attacks on the Labour Party as an organisation, or the personal sort of attacks on Labour leaders which can easily be made. Because we don't want that.

The last thing is this. It seems to me to be clear that the Party has made mistakes of a very serious character, we are just in time I think to correct them. If we leave it much longer we will have missed the boat very badly. These must be corrected, we must also be ready in the Party meetings to go into the greatest self-criticism, because there is a general feeling among the Party membership about something being wrong. We have to take very great care, and I believe that what Comrade Dutt said indicated it, but perhaps it wants going into it more, to find out what the errors we have made are and what the roots of them are. If we can find the roots of these mistakes which have been made, find out what really caused them, there is one thing which will come out of it and that is that we won't make such mistakes again. If we don't do that, the conclusions for us and what is worse, for the working class, will be very bad indeed, so this has got to be gone into and we have to have around this line which has been put forward a united Party and a united Party leadership.

## *William Rust*

I completely agree with the statement made by Comrade Dutt this morning, and in fact that statement was made on behalf of the Secretariat and worked out by the Secretariat. I say that because Comrade Gallacher, in the course of his remarks, made references to the three ruthless revolutionaries who had come forward with this line and proposals, etc, but I think it should be made clear that actually we know we make no claim to such a great honour. It is only that we were in a situation which showed the Central Committee it was necessary for a group of comrades to undertake the responsibilities of leading the work of the Party, and to put forward at this Central Committee a definite statement with regard to line and what should be done in this situation. I don't think more need be said about the remarks of Comrade Gallacher because he made no contribution to the discussion on any of the vital problems. In fact Comrade Gallacher increasingly has shown an attitude to this Central Committee and Political Bureau of a kind of elder statesman who sometimes comes in and sometimes does not, who sometimes makes a contribution and will walk out. It is definitely not playing the role he should do as one of the oldest and most experienced comrades in the Party.

I would not speak further in the discussion, seeing that Comrade Dutt has so completely covered the position, but for the fact that I believe it is essential to add some words about the contribution made by Comrade Campbell. I believe that that contribution is even a departure from the earlier manifesto. I think also that it is in basic opposition to the Leninist attitude to imperialist war. But would perhaps not be of great advantage to labour the question

from the purely theoretical standpoint. We did attempt to include that Leninist standpoint when we formulated the line of fighting on two fronts, although we were increasingly compelled by the facts and experience to realise the impossibility of that position, and to turn in our practical work more and more to the position of the fight on the home front against the Chamberlain government. I am quite sure that even without the intervention of the Comintern we would have reached that position.

The fact is this, the developments of the peace issue would have brought us right up against it, but Comrade Campbell's position I think, as I will show on the basis of the facts, is in reality even an abandonment of the attempt to carry on the fight on two fronts. It is a pure concentration of the fight on one front against Hitler, and so far as the Chamberlain government is concerned, to make a number of demands with regard to the effective carrying out of the war so that it will act efficiently in the struggle against Hitler fascism. But on the question of the facts, I always thought that facts were a strong point with Johnny, but it seems to me that his contribution today has been in total disregard of the actual facts which are before us and the events taking place at the present time. In his anxiety to develop the arguments for his case, in his anxiety to make our flesh creep at the dread prospect of letting in Hitler fascism, we get a duly distorted picture of the actual situation, because the plain fact is not the power of Germany but the weakness of Germany. That is the essence of the situation.

Who is suing for peace? Chamberlain and Daladier? No. Hitler is suing for peace. Hitler is in the position that he knows that it is a dangerous gamble to attempt to carry on the war against the western powers. To talk about flushed with victory ... Hitler himself may be flushed with victory, and of course we know the temperamental peculiarities of Hitler, but if you take the position of German fascism, the results of its war so far, the transformation of the situation in the East to the advantage of the Soviet Union, you might describe that as a position where they are flushed with victory. In fact the imperialists of this country are



themselves underlining precisely the fact. Every newspaper says that Stalin is the winner and so on. We know of course there is a lot of wishful thinking in the press, they are hoping that Stalin may come in on the side of British imperialism, that idea dies hard, but the facts are plain and one cannot get over these facts of the weakness of fascism by referring to the increased strength of the Soviet Union as being an increase in its diplomatic weight.

What has happened in the world? The Soviet Union has increased its diplomatic weight. He [Campbell] used the phrase twice. He used it in order to avoid stating exactly and precisely the position. Namely that from the Baltic to the Balkans the Soviet Union has greatly increased its power, has extended Soviet influence in country after country, has brought vast stretches of Eastern Europe under the Soviet flag and is now manoeuvring for a position where it intends to prepare the way for the further extension of that power.

And I want to say something about that in connection with peace and what is finally going to happen to that part of Poland that is under the domination of Hitler at the present moment. Johnny claims that there is an attempt on the part of the Comintern to change all our fundamental conceptions, to revise them. I don't think there is a revision of our fundamental conceptions of this post-war period of the period of wars and revolutions, of the role of the Soviet Union and of the basic divisions in the capitalist world and the fact that the Soviet Union can only exist on the basis of international solidarity and so forth. I think the only indication that we have had so far of a revision of fundamental conceptions is on the part of Comrade Campbell. As I listened to him describing the role of British imperialism it seemed to me that here was a picture of a man eating tiger who had turned to vegetarianism. I took a note – 'British imperialism is defending imperial interests but objectively hindering fascism'. If that is our analysis then indeed it is not us who are making the somersault but is Chamberlain who is making the somersault. We have always said that British imperialism has played the role of helping and strengthening fascism.

**Campbell** – (interjection) You say Chamberlain is the man who has turned a somersault?

**Rust** – You will find that that is not so much a somersault after all, and in any case we will see exactly what Chamberlain is going to do, because we are a little bit in the realm of political prophecy when we commit ourselves to exactly what he is going to do. As a matter of fact Chamberlain may attempt to achieve that aim not through the course of the negotiations but through the course of war and believe that that is the only way to do it, but it won't be for the purpose of clearing the way for the erection of a workers' state in Germany.

Take the actual facts of the war. The reason why Poland suffered this fate was because of the policy of British imperialism, because Poland sold itself to British imperialism, because Poland became a pawn in the game, and was let down so far as the people are concerned. So far as the ruling class were concerned they knew what they were doing. *Pravda* and *Izvestia* said that Poland taking part in the war was beginning the war. The point at issue is what role did Poland play as a state. It is now clear. It was not clear before. And we made mistakes about the role that Poland was playing. But what role has Poland played as a state? From the point where Poland refused Russian aid, Poland was definitely allying itself with British imperialism. In that sense the Polish government was objectively playing the role of one of those governments that was creating the conditions that led to war. Therefore Poland has suffered this fate because of the role that it allowed itself to play in that it has allied itself to British imperialism.

But the point is our analysis of British imperialism, what role it has played in assisting fascism and reactionary movements, what role so far as the fomentor of war on the Soviet Union, the role it plays as the oppressor of the colonies. We are not going to let this drop out of the picture as Johnny wants us to do – that is what he is suggesting we should do. It is precisely that aspect of it

that we have to emphasise at the present time in view of the changed relation of forces, in view of the fact that it is definitely the French and British imperialists who are the pacemakers of the war at the present moment. As for fascist tendencies, here there is no somersault proposed on our part.

Comrade Lee put the thing in an extreme way and in an incorrect way about France going fascist. But are there fascist tendencies in France? Absolutely there are. Are there fascist tendencies in Britain? Absolutely. Are we saying we are not concerned about fascism and democracy? On the contrary. To wage the biggest fight in this country for democratic rights against fascist tendencies, but that does not blind us to the fact that on the international scale there is a change in the relation of forces, that the fascist countries are no longer playing the role that they were and that the role of aggressor and pacemaker of the war is passing more directly into the hands of the French and British imperialists.

When the call is made for peace, here I think we have to have a very clear and definite position. It is not simply a case of saying the Soviet Union proposes peace, peace is a splendid thing, we all like it and so on, and it means removing the horrors of war, and whatever the costs are therefore we are going to work for peace. That is a pacifist position, nothing in common with our point of view. The call made from Moscow for peace is in essence a call to the French and British working class to intensify the fight against their own governments. And in that way to fight to bring about peace. And that is the conclusion that we have to draw from it.

Comrade Campbell is in opposition on that, apart from saying, on the question of Poland, shall we advocate a plebiscite or not? He suggests we should lay this down as a condition. I don't think we should because it is not our job in this situation to lay down the conditions of peace with regard to Eastern Europe, in which the Soviet Union is going to have a say, and make their position clear, and we don't know what they have up their sleeve so far as Poland is concerned. Our job is to make it clear that we are not

prepared to fight for these war aims that the Chamberlain government is standing for. We make that clear. We show the need for the fight against the policies of our government in order to bring about peace which will further strengthen the working class and enable the Soviet Union to continue the policy that it has embarked upon. So far as Poland is concerned, here is a matter we have to watch, because we don't think that the fate of Poland is finally settled or clear.

I think there is something in what Molotov said when he remarked that they will endeavour to extricate the Polish people. I don't think he meant by that to leave them under Nazism. There may be certain proposals coming from Moscow with regard to Poland. In any case we have the fact that these new frontiers have been established, that the Red Army has been on part of that territory which has now been returned to Nazi territory. This is going to have a big ideological effect upon the Polish workers and peasants who live there, and in any case this triumph for Nazi Germany over a certain part of Poland can in no way be regarded as a permanent victory. What is more, and more important to us, we should not put forward demands and make statements that can be used by the imperialists as an excuse for the carrying on of the war. They are using the position of Poland as one of the reasons why the British working class should carry on the war.

But the main thing that we must be concerned about in our general line on peace – that explains the controversy in the Political Bureau last Friday – is that in our treatment of the peace question do we say that the main obstacle to a peace in this situation is Nazi aggression, or is it the policy of Daladier and Chamberlain? The position is clear – that we as a British Party have to take the position that the main obstacle is the policy of the Chamberlain's government. We concentrate our fire against the Chamberlain government because there are elements of British imperialism who, according to their published statements, are determined to carry on the war, and carry it on for imperialist aims. Therefore, with the question of peace

raised in this way, we take a stand definitely against our own government, its warlike aims and its proclaimed function of carrying on the war.

The statement has been drawn up with great difficulty because it is an attempt to draw it up in a situation where the line is not fully clear, and where a tremendous change is taking place in the international situation. I think as a result of the discussion this statement could be worked on further and we can get right through it a clear and logical presentation of the things we stand for at the present time. In any case let us remember that we are dealing with an imperialist war which is taking place in peculiar conditions. In many respects it is an imperialist war which is not under way so far as the main engagements are concerned between the imperialist powers. That is why we are not talking about transforming the imperialist war into civil war. Because owing to the peculiarities of the situation, the fact that both sides have no particular desire to get at one another because their chief desire is to get at the Soviet Union, and owing to the fact that the Soviet Union has taken advantage of all these contradictions and thrown the issue of peace into the world and amongst the masses, this is a situation where the practical issue before us, on which we have to concentrate, is our policy with regard to peace and not the general propagation of our full and abstract position with regard to imperialist war.

Now I said that the main thing that arises from the call for peace is our activity in this country, our working class struggle against the National Government. I want to emphasise that, because the increasing feature of the situation that we are tending to overlook is the discontent of the masses of all countries, is the rising revolutionary movement which we see clearly in Eastern Europe and which I think we are going to see more clearly in Germany in the near future. Because you cannot ignore what is appearing in the press. You cannot ignore that Rotterdam statement which was not quite what Johnny said if you read it through. You cannot ignore what is written today in the *News Chronicle*, or what is quoted from *Scrutator* in the *Daily Worker* with regard to English people not being very happy

about this state of affairs in Eastern Europe and making overtures to Germany. We know what period we are living in.

We know the revolutionary feeling. How many times have we repeated Stalin's statement that the only reason why the working class of the various countries in this period don't succeed in going forward against capitalism that is ripe for overthrow is because their faith in their own revolutionary ability has been undermined? But the revolutionary elements are there and striving all the time. It is our job not to lose sight of the revolutionary perspectives and wrong to treat them as if they did not exist, and that is how Johnny treats them.

And then again he tries to frighten us off, to make our flesh creep not only with the prospect that we are going to come under Hitler, but that we are now going to become ultra-revolutionaries, we are going to lose all our democratic friends, will have no practical slogans to put forward etc. Let me say on this point about losing our democratic friends: I am sure of one thing, if there is anything in the long run that is going to cut us off from our democratic friends it will be standing on this present position. It will be conveying the idea that we are for the war to the finish, the war to the knife.

It is all very well for Johnny to describe what the thought of the British and French people will be, but what will the thought of the German people be if British and French imperialism triumph? It is all very well to say we are going to draw a distinction between those who stand for a democratic peace and the others. But if we go on with the policy it will mean we are committed to war to the end and support of the Chamberlain government. Then we will find that it will be the policy of the imperialists that will triumph, and that the democratic people of this country may revolt much quicker against that position and see where it is going than we do. We should bear that in mind, because far from it being the case that our line has safely placed us on the road that leads to the further extension of mass influence, there are many indications in the practical work of the party that indicate that we have come aside

from important sections of the workers, that our fight on mass issues, especially the factory issues, has not been conducted with the necessary vigour and struggle.

I have been told of place after place where comrades, members of the Party, have felt rather alarmed, because of our general line, about coming forward and making proposals on behalf of the workers, because they felt it meant interfering with the work. And the workers have said to hell with the war. That is the position that we are already getting into and just an indication of the dangers which might arise.

So far as the government question is concerned, here I think there is room for a good exchange of opinion. How can we put the question of the government in the new situation? There are obvious difficulties, because if we say for a people's government, then the argument can be made that by proposing a people's government we must include elements who are imperialist, because what would the composition be? Before the war the position was clearer, we could make demands when we were fighting for the peace front. We could state with some degree of exactitude the composition of the people's government.

Now there are difficulties in doing that, but we should not let the conception of the people's government go by the board because of the difficulties in defining the composition. But at this particular moment, when the slogan of people's government might convey the idea that we are for a government of Labour leaders and Churchill as against Chamberlain, I think that we can content ourselves with the slogan of down with Chamberlain, because in any case when we are fighting for the people's government what has been the main thing that we have concentrated on? Pressure on the existing government. How many times have we warned the Party, that when we come out for a new government, we do not postpone our demands and fight until we get that government? Mass pressure on this government may have the effect of bringing about marked changes in its policy because of their fear of working-class opinion.

The final point is with regard to the future work of the

Party. We have to face, I believe, a difficult situation. What has happened to the French Party is an idea that is running through the minds of the ruling class of this country. We have had reports of different characters on the visit of Noel-Baker to Paris, to discuss with Blum about different events. We know the bitter hatred in the minds of the Second International leaders towards the Communist International and our Party, and so whatever they may say in public about democracy and so forth, I am quite sure that we cannot rely upon the leaders of the Labour Party to make a stand against any attack that will come on the Communist Party in this country. They might welcome it, they might even foment it if they thought we were getting too dangerous in the development of our activities.

Now that does not mean that we have to talk about it in the press or in meetings – the Communist Party faces illegality and what are we going to do, and so on. But the main note we strike is that the Party carries on, exercises its full democratic rights, but what we have to do inside the Party is to prepare for such a situation. We have to prepare the minds of our members, especially our leading comrades, we have to take steps, especially in the District Committees and with our Branch Secretaries, to make them understand the necessity of pursuing the directions already indicated. I believe it will be necessary to utilise the opportunity afforded by this meeting to have a meeting with the comrades from the districts in order to work out a number of points and to make suggestions in order to provide for every emergency.



## *George Crane*

I was not at the discussion last week, but I don't plead ignorance of the situation because Comrade Williams gave a full report on what took place. What I feel alarmed about is the statement. I will refer to the speech of Comrade Gallacher when he refers to the position in the Comintern or the Parties making up the Comintern and the differences of policy. It is a serious statement to make. I remember what took place in the last war and was active, although not in any particular party, and the confusion that was aroused in the period. What did many of us say and what were the arguments presented to us when we joined the Party in 1920? As a result of building a world Party we would avoid the situation of 1914, and Comrade Gallacher presents us with a picture of a parallel of 1914. It is the most damning statement I have ever heard made in the history of our Party and something should be done to verify such a statement.

I think again that Comrade Dutt, along with the other comrades, is pressing a defence line for the case of the mass of the people in Britain, arguing that it is a sure thing that the combined forces of Britain and France can defeat Germany. I am not too sure about it. In any case that should not be our line. The line that we are presenting is that whichever way the war goes it is the question of the world working class against their imperialist masters in their respective countries, not presenting a case that we are sure to beat Germany.

In the same way, why is it that Churchill desires to win the support of the Soviet Union? He has not given up this idea. The same with Lloyd George's statement in the last week. It is the fear of these people who were in the last war cabinets, the fear that the British imperialists and the

French imperialists are not capable of winning the war against Germany unless they have some additional forces. And therefore I think it would be a fatal mistake to present our case along the line that Britain is bound to win the war. We should far sooner take the line that it is an imperialist war and we have nothing to achieve by assistance to winning that war.

I think Comrade Campbell should have dealt more logically even with his case. It is very significant that Comrade Campbell, who always builds up a good case, left out the decision on the French Communist Party. I am sure that such a serious position as the banning of the Party paper, and the suppression of the Party since on an insignificant issue, has to be noted in such a serious debate as we have today. Why is it that the French ruling class suppressed the French Party, despite the fact that the French Communist Party had taken the same line as we had? It was the fear that ultimately the truth would come out and therefore it would be necessary to fight the French Communist Party. And we have to be warned against such a situation here.

Now as to what has happened in this country. I believe that by the carrying forward of the policy as we have done, it has certainly meant, as Comrade Dutt stated, a damping down of our struggle on economic issues. Since the war broke out to the present moment we have had no lead from the Metal Bureau<sup>1</sup> in regard to engineering, although the Metal Bureau fraction meeting did take place. In a month we have been left without any central leadership on important issues. Comrades who met on that particular Sunday were not certain whether we should advance the demand for the immediate 10/- advance or leave it, bearing in mind this is a just war and we don't want to hamper our ruling class with such demands. We since had the factories themselves pressing demands to increase wages and improvement of condition. At a special conference that was held by the AEU in Birmingham last Sunday, in spite of tremendous opposition, we got this through and had one of the finest conferences ever held. We put our line for the increase of wages, control of dilution,<sup>2</sup> the limitation of overtime.

This was overwhelmingly accepted. An amendment was put against it by the ex-President of the District Committee, a man who has been in the leadership for many years, who got up and said that he would deplore this demand for increases of wages when the country is in such a serious position. He condemned also very emphatically those who were fighting against their government. The result was he was shouted down. They would not allow him to continue his speech, also he never got a seconder to his amendment.

What are we facing? Go in any factory today. I don't care what part of the country you go to, either the strongholds of trade unionism, or the weak sections. There you will find, since the outbreak of the war, one of the greatest offensives that the employing class has ever carried out against the working class, and we have done nothing of any note to mobilise the workers against the employing class. Only when the workers have taken the initiative on their own have any results come. For example, just on the outbreak of the war, the employers carry on a campaign that there is no need for any trade union agreements now. We are practically under martial law, and what is the good of talking about overtime agreements? The question of dilution, although entered into between the engineering union and the employers, has never yet been accepted. Machinery has been set up for the control of dilution, but I know of no district which has utilised the machinery. The employers have swept it on one side.

**Allison** – (interjection) It is being used in Sheffield.

**Crane** – Where we have a shop stewards' movement – because we have not given the call to the shop stewards' movement for action of an aggressive character against the employers. On the question of overtime, the same thing applies. We had a comrade from Leicester argue that we should discuss with the employers rationalisation of their industry so as to accelerate the output.

On the question of the trade union movement itself. Even in a period like this we are having to record that victimisation is taking place inside the factories at the moment. I remember in 1914, as soon as the factory started working overtime, the workers were on the offensive against the employers, and today the employers are on the offensive against us.

I am going to tell you that it is going to be very difficult to get any national wages increase. When I discussed with the employer last week about outstanding demands, he gave us a lecture on war profiteering. Therefore I think that if we change this line, we should carry forward the highest offensive we have ever carried forward to mobilise the whole of our Party on these economic issues. The workers are incensed with the attitude of the employers attacking also the conditions inside the factory. The ventilation as a result of the blackout, produces a very bad atmosphere to work in. Strikes are taking place every day in the Midlands. Strikes against excessive overtime, for the district rate to be applied. In one factory we had a report of one chap receiving the inclusive wage of 45/- a week, and we talk about getting high wages out of the war situation.

Now as to the feeling of the chaps inside the factory. What is their feeling? I am telling you this in all sincerity, they don't care a damn about the war. When the position got so bad in our own factory and I had to call a mass meeting, there were 700 to 800 people there, and their whole feeling was against the Hitlers inside the factories. When you talk to the young chaps about joining the army, at first it was a democratic war, they said that's alright telling us about that, but we know what happened in the last war, when we came back there was unemployment, and worsening of conditions, and we don't see there is any need to go out there. This is the feeling of tens of thousands of young people today. They are not interested in the war, they don't want to go to the war and they are doing everything possible to get out of it.

The reservists called up in engineering come to ask us if we cannot use the union machinery to get them withdrawn

from the army. Some may argue that this was probably as a result of the earlier line we took that Britain should be responsible for the production of munitions and not to join the army. But these are facts that we have to face. Maybe it is because there have not been any mass casualties. Maybe that is the reason there is not this feeling of support for the war, because there is the absence of mass casualties, there has been no major war campaign yet. It may be there is some truth in that. But I don't think we have a situation similar to 1914 when they had all the flag-waving etc. You have not that position today. There is a reluctance on the part of the mass of the people to join the army, is this because of the conditions that the people are suffering under in this country, and also because of the policy we have pursued?

I believe that Comrade Campbell wrote an article in the *Labour Monthly*<sup>3</sup> of June this year dealing with the fight against fascism and the role of the Chamberlain Government. I believe it was Comrade Campbell who said in this article what had been the role of the Chamberlain government, to line itself up with the forces of fascism destroying the centres of democracy. The logic of this was that the war therefore was one of an open class character and was not one just purely of national democracy. The logic of it was a war in which the whole of the working class in the world were facing their imperialist masters. And if we see that, the question of Poland is quite different. We did make a mistake in putting forward this line that we should support the war because Poland was attacked. If we had seen it in the way it should have been seen, the refusal of Poland to accept the assistance of Russia meant there was a change in the situation, and we had not recognised that change.

Again in regard to the Soviet Union, we made similar mistakes when the Soviet Union took certain lines such as the Pact between Germany and Russia. There was tremendous opposition inside the labour movement. We made many explanations of it. We said it was to the good of the British, instead of seeing that it was part of the policy of the Soviet Union in defending the Soviet Union

and the international working class. Then when Russia invaded Poland what a howl went up. It could not be true – this was some more work of the fascists in this country in producing such statements. When it came into the press, then we argued that this was for the defence and benefit of Great Britain and France. All the arguments have been for the defence of our own imperialist masters and not in seeing, as we should have seen, that Russia was out to defend her own frontiers and all the working class.

My own view is that Russia was far more capable in diplomatic circles of outmanoeuvring Britain and France and also Germany. What I am not too clear upon is that at one time we had argued that if we could only get Germany and Britain at war with each other this would be for the benefit of Russia, and now of course we have changed in this direction. One thing we were wrong on. It is because of the early mistakes of our Party from 1927 onwards, taking a sectarian line, that our fears have been in the recent months a fear of isolation and a fear of returning to the period of sectarianism.

It has been partly due to the policy we held in the last eighteen months, when we certainly became a popular party in this country and were recognised as a Party of some influence and a Party that could be relied upon as it should be by sincere people. It is because of this that we still wanted to maintain this popular Party idea and not change too quickly to a policy that may lead us for a short period into a period where we may be isolated because of hostility against us. It is because of this that we still tried to cling to the past instead of facing up to the future. Because the imperialist war has not happened in the way we thought it should, therefore we are opposed to the change as it should be.

In the ranks of the labour movement itself one finds, of course, opposition to us in presenting this line. Our district secretary, who is a Labour alderman, says 'when I read the *Daily Worker* this week, you fellows have come along to us, you have almost smashed our meetings up to demand that we fight fascism, and now you are saying that Germany is no longer the aggressor but Britain and

France are the aggressors, and we are now no longer going to fight fascism but we are going to attack our own'. He said 'I am not prepared to accept this. I am of the opinion that when Moscow changes its tune, it calls the tune to the British Communist Party'. These are some of the arguments that one has to face. But why have we got to worry about these arguments so much? Let us face the situation that confronts the people at the present moment. Are first of all the British people desirous of war? Can you proclaim to the world that the British people are unanimous for the war? Could you prove that there is that amount of recruiting? If we took an analysis of the people of Great Britain you would find that the mass of the people are not for the war. Maybe you would argue, for different reasons – the blackouts, the drive against the economic conditions of the people of this country, but all these are factors that one has to take note of, and is it any accident that the British ruling class aimed the attack on the British workers first? Take the Budget. I was going through it last week and someone told me they got £7 a week and got married, and they have to pay 10/- income tax as well as the increased cost of living. Then we can't call easy the tremendous burdens already thrust upon their backs, and no efforts have been made by us in any energetic way to throw the responsibility on the backs of the ruling class, and therefore that is what this line has brought us to.

I don't appreciate, I understood when I joined the Party years ago that our differences would be hammered out in a leading way but I see many leading comrades here for whom I have had the greatest admiration, people who have been almost as gods to me – that we see the attitude of these comrades has not been helpful to us in such a critical situation as a war situation. I would have expected the leadership of the British Communist Party to have faced the war situation in a different manner, to what they have done. And although I am a part of this Central Committee I accept my responsibility in this, it is very deplorable that this is the third time that we have made such grave blunders. There is something wrong with our

leadership and with our party that we can go on blindly blundering along and have to wait for someone else to help us out, and when they are prepared to help us out they are met with bitter hostility. It is a deplorable situation.

*Notes*

1. CPGB committee to oversee and direct party activity in the engineering industry and unions.
2. This was the name given to the wartime practice of employing unskilled or semi-skilled workers in jobs normally held by skilled workers. Dilution generally occurred with the agreement of the relevant trade unions, and was closely monitored by them.
3. *Magazine* (1921-81), founded, edited and controlled by R.P. Dutt. Dutt's regular reviews of the political scene 'Notes of the Month' enjoyed considerable authority among communists.



## *Emile Burns*

Comrade Dutt said after he had finished his speech when he was interrupted, that he did not want to open up any personal questions, that everything he was raising was entirely impersonal and so on.

Now I want to make it absolutely clear that in the remarks which I am going to make I am going to be extremely personal, and I want to say that I entirely agree with what Comrade Gallacher said in regard to the statement with which Comrade Dutt opened these proceedings. I want to describe to the comrades who were not present what actually took place at that meeting, which I don't think would be challenged by any of these comrades because I have witnesses on my side, that the other comrades who were not present will be able to judge the peculiarly low and dastardly character of the statement made here at the opening of the proceedings.

What was the position on Friday? The position was that there were eight comrades of the political bureau<sup>1</sup> present. There were three propositions. There was a draft which had been made, so far as I know, by Comrades Dutt, Rust and Springhall, which was typed and before us. There was a statement made by Comrade Campbell, also typed and before us. And as Comrade Gallacher said, he did not agree with either of these and he therefore wrote out a separate proposal. Speaking for myself I looked at Campbell's and I looked at the other draaft and I completely rejected both of them out of hand. And I supported Comrade Gallacher's proposal. I cannot remember who exactly moved that Comrade Gallacher's proposal be taken as the basis, but I want every comrade here to understand perfectly clearly that this was agreed to

by comrades Dutt, Rust and Springhall, without the slightest opposition.

**Rust** – (interjection) I said that I stood for the document that had been presented by the Secretariat but, recognising that there was in the Political Bureau a majority against that line, I was prepared to discuss Comrade Gallacher's document with the object of making it as good as I could, although I did not agree. I therefore endeavoured to do that and made a contribution along that line. Also in the end I insisted that it should be published by the Editorial Board<sup>2</sup> and not the Political Bureau.

**Burns** – What he said has not altered what I said. The position was that we did agree that we work on the basis of this draft. It was typed out, we went through it, amendments were made by agreement with Comrade Gallacher and the other comrades. We were all trying to work collectively ...

**Campbell** – (interjection) And Comrade Rust introduced the 'new government' into the document.

**Burns** – Then, comrades, I want to say that there was this particular clause which has been referred to, which Comrade Gallacher cited, and which he pointed out as almost identical with a clause in the typed document which has been presented to us by these three this morning. On this there was a very long discussion and I remember quite distinctly that I said that it must be ended, we must vote on this, we must finish this, and the vote was taken and it was 5 to 3. There was no sharp protest, no complete repudiation of the document, it was simply accepted just as the other amendments had been accepted in the course of going through the documents.

It is perfectly true that it was agreed, and Comrade Rust

is probably right when he says he proposed it should be in the name of the Editorial Board, but there absolutely no repudiation of that document by the members of the Political Bureau. That a fraction of three members of the Political Bureau, who assume the right to lead this Party, should then meet after the meeting of the Political Bureau and think it their right to report to the Central Committee condemning the Political Bureau in the terms that Comrade Dutt did this morning, seems to me something which would entitle the comrades to be removed from any position of leadership in any Party.

**Allison** – (interjection) It is all very confusing to us. Burns used the phrase that three comrades assumed the leadership of the Party.

**Burns** – I am going to deal with that point a little further on. I want to say that, quite apart from the question of the line, I want to give my views very decisively and to ask every comrade who is a member of the Central Committee to think of this when the question comes up of who is to be the leadership of this Party from this moment on. Remember that no Party can ever succeed, no matter what its line may be, if that line is not being carried out by sincere, loyal people prepared to work collectively, but by people who are simply opportunist as Comrade Gallacher said, and prepared to use the most vile fractional methods against their colleagues on the Political Bureau.

Now comrades I want to come on to the question of the general thesis. So far as the general thesis is concerned the comrades of the Political Bureau and to a certain extent of the Central Committee, will know that I have wobbled, I have changed, I have vacillated on this question, and I am not ashamed to say so. But Comrade Dutt never gave any hint of it. Comrade Dutt never gave any hint that he and Comrade Rust, (as for Comrade Springhall I have never heard him give any reason apart from the Comintern line), vacillated in this period. I want to say that many of us really regard it our responsibility to the Party and the

British working class movement to try to understand things, and in the course of trying to understand things we try to get in touch with other comrades and talk it out in a friendly way. If we are in control of a meeting we try to take an attitude which will draw out the opinions of comrades, not the attitude which Comrade Dutt came to the meeting with, which we understand was the combined effort of Comrades Dutt, Rust and Springhall.

The position is simply this, I am going to express now my views of the points which I have reached, and I am not ashamed to say that I don't entirely agree with the thesis. The point is that I absolutely accept that at the present time the war is an imperialist war on all sides. I absolutely accept that. But I cannot understand the attitude of the thesis, and particularly of Comrade Dutt, in relation to Poland. I cannot understand why the defence of that country should not have been supported by the Polish working class. I have no doubt that I am wrong if I am against the Comintern on this point. All I want to say is that I don't understand it and I am not ashamed to say that.

Then one or two points about this. To carry on from this approach from the Comintern to the point of absolutely falsifying history seems to me something that the Comintern would not thank Comrade Dutt and the other advocates of the line for. How is it possible to ignore the whole of the history preceding the actual situation in August or September of this year? How can this be ignored? How can it be ignored that the fascist countries were the consistent aggressors branded in every article, every book? In the August issue of the *Communist International*, you will find a whole series of articles in which it is indicated that war against the fascist countries, under any circumstances so to speak, is a holy war. They don't use the phrase, but that is the essence of the thing. And to just simply wipe out the whole of that, and present the thing as is done in this document, about Britain and France, this war of British and French imperialism, leaving out Germany's responsibility and so on, is not going to help the Party to understand the line, and I don't believe that it is a presentation with which any serious comrade can agree.

Therefore I want to say that in regard to the resolution which, as I understand it, is our resolution, the resolution before this Central Committee, the statement in this that the working class can under no conditions defend Fascist Poland – it is absurd for us at this stage to pass such a resolution, when Fascist Poland is a thing of the past. I shall be told that this is conciliationist and so on, but the form which I would wholeheartedly support, is that the working class can under no conditions support the war for the restoration of Fascist Poland. That seems to me to be the point of vital importance for us at this time and on this point I am completely prepared to agree.

The other point on which I am as yet unconvinced is that differentiation between the fascist and the democratic states has now no further sense. I believe that this is calling attention to something, but I don't think Comrade Dutt has explained what it is. And I don't think that we can get, so to speak, any sincere voting for the thesis, if that phrase just stands as it is without any explanation at all. What we have to add is that the differentiation has lost its former sense in relation to the present international situation, inasmuch as both groups are now engaged in a war for their imperialist aims.

Now it seems to me that in that form it is absolutely correct, and I shall accept it, but the point I am driving at is that once war has begun in this situation, there cannot be any difference between them in relation to their imperialist aims, in relation to their carrying on of the war. An attempt has been made to present it as if British and French imperialism are the driving force in this war. This is not the line of the thesis. The line of the thesis is that all sides are in it for their imperialist purposes. Any sort of concentration on British and French imperialism, forgetting German imperialism, is not a loyal presentation of the thesis, certainly not a good understanding of it.

Then, arising from my wanting that to be in, I don't want us to fall into the position in which we say that something that has existed in the past now has lost its former sense, and will never have any sense again – because that is the line that Comrade Dutt is putting forward. What

is the position? It seems to me absolutely clear that if the war is ended without some new organisation of society – I don't want to speculate on this, but if after this war there is still fascism, and there are still democratic states (of course it is true the democratic states may become fascist), nothing will convince me, at any rate at present, that there will be no difference between these in relation to the further prospects of international war, aggression and so on. Therefore, while I am prepared to accept it in relation to the present war situation, I think it would be absolutely wrong to treat it as something permanent and unchangeable, that there is no difference between fascism and democracy even in the international sphere.

Having said this, I want to say that so far as the present position is concerned, I am in agreement with the general line of the thesis, and I will vote for it. And I will vote for it in spite of Comrade Dutt's attempts to intimidate comrades. In saying they must not vote for it unless they wholeheartedly believe in it, he hopes that there will be very few of us who will sincerely accept everything and vote for it, he hopes that as many as possible will vote against it so that he and his colleagues can be represented as the real nucleus of the Comintern to carry the line forward in the British Party.

Now what is it that we are asked to accept? There are certain formulations in the thesis which we are asked to accept, and also an interpretation and an argument developed by Comrade Dutt which is going to be a test for him to see if he has his way and whether comrades really accept it or not. And I want to say this, I think the Comintern would not be prepared to accept Comrade Dutt's line on a number of these points. Take for example some of the formulations which Comrade Rust correctly pointed out are not merely Comrade Dutt's, but the combined efforts of the three comrades concerned. Dutt spoke for example of the changed role of British and French imperialism. That they were no longer progressive. At what stage they had been progressive is indeed a very curious formulation to find in the course of explaining the Comintern line.

**Dutt** – (interjection) I would ask for criticisms to be passed on actual statements. In dealing with the statement of the thesis that the distinction between fascist and democratic states has lost its significance in this situation, which I explained as I understand it, Burns interpolated 'and will never have any such significance', which he claimed I had said. Now with regard to this example about the progressive role, I used very careful words. Namely there was the possibility of a progressive role had they participated in a peace front, but its rejection closed that possibility. He can deal with that, but must deal with what was said.

**Burns** – If I misrepresented it, I am sorry. However this does not alter some of my further points. This is that fascism was previously leading the world reactionary front, but that it is now compelled to abandon its anti-soviet aims. What does the thesis say? That the aim of German fascism is world domination. Does it exclude anti-soviet aims? Is it, so to speak, the conception of Nazi Germany swallowing up all the hostile empires and so on and sitting down passive, side by side with the Soviet Union?

Reference was made by Rust in a rather contemptuous way to the suggestion that Britain had become a man-eating tiger converted to vegetarianism. I want to ask you, what is the presentation of Hitler fascism or Nazi Germany presented by Comrade Dutt? Is it not that the man-eating tiger has converted to Socialism? Is it not absolutely clear that in the course of developing certain of the valuable ideas contained in the thesis, comrade Dutt has developed them to such an extent that they are absolutely unrecognisable and can never be accepted in the form in which he puts them forward?

Then we have the statement that German fascism is desperately searching for peace because they know the result would be revolution. Now what exactly are we to infer from this statement? One would imagine that the inference would be, if this is the position, well, the sooner they are defeated the better, ridding the world of fascism

and so on. I don't accept either that line, of a war to the bitter end in order to destroy German Fascism, nor do I accept the position that German fascism is desperately searching for peace because they know the result would be revolution. It is not exactly like that, and that is not one of the forms in which we have to present our line.

Then we have the further statement that the struggle which had been democracy versus fascism (and I must say comrades, I may get some of these phrases wrong, I just took down notes and the general sense), that the struggle has now gone back to the imperialist world versus the socialist world. Was it really the democratic states versus the fascist states, with the Soviet Union out of the picture, before?

**Dutt** – (interjection) This was the issue since 1917.

**Burns** – In any case comrades is it not also clear that, if the position is that it is back to imperialism versus socialism (which it always was and yet it has come back to it), then Nazi Germany is in the imperialist side, not the socialist side? So I don't see where the argument leads.

Then we have Comrade Dutt's point on the manifesto, that in the manifesto there was no attack on British imperialism as a whole. I think this is a misrepresentation of the manifesto. It is perfectly true that in that manifesto there is no such phrase, as no doubt Comrade Dutt would have written, but the whole essence of the fight on the two fronts is that on one front there is the fight against British monopoly capital, the imperialist aims personified by Chamberlain. It is true it takes the form of Chamberlain in the presentation, but the essence of the thing is the attack on capitalism as a whole.

Then there is the point that the struggle on two fronts is a contradiction. Now I want comrades just to try to gather precisely what this means. If the struggle on two fronts is a contradiction, let us just consider the position, the policy which we were working towards during the period of the



peace front. What were we working to? We were working to a peace front including Britain and France with the Soviet Union. Indeed had that peace front materialised (and it is useless to tell me that it did not materialise, I know that as well as anyone else, but the policy of the whole of the Comintern was trying to bring about that situation), what would have been the position? Would it have been that there should only have been one front? Would it have been that we in the peace front should have raised the slogan of behind Chamberlain? All behind the employers? All behind British imperialism? Is this really the meaning? And yet this is the sense in which Dutt says there is a contradiction in the idea of the battle on two fronts. And I want to say that there is no contradiction at all. The issue may be wrong, but it is not proved wrong by saying that there is a contradiction because there is none.

Well, I want further to say that when the question is presented in the form of this resolution, to which I have already suggested certain amendments, I could vote for the basis of it wholeheartedly. But even if these amendments are defeated I am going to vote for it because I believe it is the correct policy now, and I believe the points of analysis on which I disagree are not important in relation to the present situation and the necessary line for the Party. But certainly I must say that when Comrade Dutt asks comrades to vote for it on conviction, to vote for it from a full understanding of the line and so on, I think it is absolutely clear that Comrade Dutt should abstain from voting when the vote comes, because he does not even understand the line. And when we come on to the kind of general sweeping fire that Comrade Dutt directed towards the peroration of his speech against the Rip Van Winkles, etc. Any comrade who has had anything to do with Comrade Dutt knows that he can do a fair line of Rip Van Winkling himself and I don't think that this is the sort of way in which to encourage other comrades to try to get to study and really get an understanding of the situation. And what was the purpose? I want to link this up with the question that we began with. Why did the three comrades think it necessary to meet after the Political Bureau to

virtually pass a resolution to come to the Central Committee and start the proceedings of a most difficult meeting in which, according to them, they wanted all the comrades to understand and try to do their best to follow the position? Yet they pushed this in as the first item so to speak. What is the purpose of it?

I want to say, comrades, that it has one purpose and one purpose only – to get this down on the minutes. They are attempting to clear themselves by explaining how pure they are. This is the sole purpose of it, and this whole line of attack against other comrades, who are in the course of trying to understand a very difficult position – a position which at that time at any rate certainly was not understood by these comrades, for they have used old expressions, old formulations and so on. Well comrades, it is something that no one need be ashamed of if they are sincerely trying to develop and understand the line of the Party, but what comrades should be ashamed of, and what should be remembered against these comrades, is the attempt to raise this for the purpose of disruption, for the purpose of creating this differentiation between themselves as the pure ones and the rest.

Now I want to make a couple of points in regard to Comrade Campbell's contribution. I want absolutely to dissociate myself from Comrade Campbell's contribution. I think it is completely wrong and it can only do harm to the Party, any line of this sort. I want to take for example this argument (again I am not sure about the words) that any opposition to the war would put the Party with the workers –

**Campbell** – (interjection) Any abandoning of our anti-fascist attitude in connection with peace fronts, any suggestion that we were not in favour of checking German fascism would put us out of court.

**Burns** – Then on the question that he raised about fascism being stronger – I don't think it can be put that way. I think

that in addition to the territorial expansion, control of more people, of more factories and so on, we have got to see the whole international position and I think that the change in the position of the Soviet Union – with Germany no longer dominating Europe in a general political sense, from the standpoint that they could just send for people, etc., on the contrary, the Soviet Union sends for Ribbentrop and he comes – this all expresses a very important weakening of the position of German fascism which I think is of far greater importance for the future than the expansion of territory and so on. In regard to the plebiscite, I agree it is not our job to put forward detailed peace proposals, but in any case I don't think that we ought to put forward anything relating to such problems as plebiscites for Poland and omit plebiscites for India. We cannot really treat Poland as an isolated thing. The position is there, and if we begin finding solutions to them, and we think the war should be continued in order to get a plebiscite over there, then we are making a mistake.

And then, just on this point about the Soviet Union pulling the chestnuts out of the fire, we depend on the Soviet Union to be the guarantee of the new peace. I am sure you said something like that Johnny. I don't think this is a correct way of putting it at all. After all, the Soviet Union is not there to pull imperialist chestnuts out of the fire, but in order to help the working class of the world. It has repeatedly come forward offering its guarantee of peace. Pulling chestnuts out of the fire in one way or the other is a completely different conception from expecting and being confident that the Soviet Union will play its part in a new peace front if this can be developed. I just want to make this point because I don't want it to be treated as if any references to the Soviet Union to get peace is the same thing as asking them to pull out chestnuts out of the fire for us.

On the question of the line now. I want to say that there is a considerable danger in the way that Comrade Dutt presented the question of how we were to develop it. It is true he made certain saving clauses that we must be cautious and so on. But it seems to me he wanted to

frighten off any comrade from telling him that if he tried to develop it in a certain way this would express sectarian tendencies. We have known Comrade Dutt over a long period, and if there is any comrade in this Party who has persistent underlying sectarian tendencies it is Comrade Dutt, and he has these tendencies because of his formal approach to problems, not understanding the problem of getting a line across. All he is concerned with is the thesis form of the line. But there is a very serious sectarian danger in such a presentation, whatever the line may be. I don't want to go over the past, but there was the question of the united front, and the people's front government.

As I look at it I think that the presentation made by several comrades has been wrong. It is not the case that we want to drop the slogan of a united front or a people's front government, nor is it the case that we raise that slogan in the form in which we used to raise it, that is to say to include Attlee, Sinclair and maybe Churchill and Eden. It is obvious that that form of it has completely gone, but it seems to me that the position we are faced with is this, that we are not only to build the movement for revolution, it would be ridiculous to start right away now putting out slogans for revolution, beginning to rally the forces for the Soviet government and so on. This would be a completely sectarian and childish approach to it. But I think equally it would be a mistake to start definitely organising and preparing for alternative forms of government to the Chamberlain government.

What I am driving at is that I think what we want to work for and present is the idea of a government representing the people, which is going to carry through the line of making peace and developing the social conditions of this country. Carrying forward, in other words, the fight against the imperialist war and against monopoly capital here. It seems to me this is a conception you have to put forward and in the course of this you have to expose the Labour people, those Labour leaders who will not go this way, and we have to expose the Liberals and so on. We have completely to throw out any idea of Churchill, Eden or any of these people, but in regard to

alternative forms of government, I don't think it is correct that we have at each stage to be seeing the next lesser evil. The present position would be very similar, as the struggle develops, to the struggle which existed in France before the actual victory of the people's front, in which you had a more reactionary government destroyed by mass action, but the mass action not naming the new government, the reactionaries putting in someone as the stop-gap, that person being overthrown by mass action, etc.

Just one last word. The Party is in a very serious position. What is the character of this seriousness? It is not only the question of the line of the Party, fundamental though that is. I want also to say to comrades that there is a question of personalities involved in this as well, and that it is absolutely essential that the responsible members of the Central Committee should ensure that the leadership of this Party is in the hands of comrades who, it is true, accept the line and are prepared to work on the line, but also are honest and prepared to work collectively with their colleagues on whatever body it may be.

### *Notes*

1. The minutes of this meeting are not extant. Members of the Political Bureau in the autumn of 1939 included Bramley, Burns, Campbell, Dutt, Gallacher, Pollitt, Rust and Springhall.
2. The reference here is to the Daily Worker editorial board. This was just a convenient fiction, as the statement (q.v.) actually originated from the CPGB political bureau.

## *Bert Williams*

Although I am not a member of the Central Committee a discussion of this character is one in which it is necessary for everyone to state quite clearly where they stand. I want to say quite frankly that had I spoken last week, I would have opposed the line put forward by Comrade Dutt. One of the main reasons was that I felt that Comrade Dutt presented his line in a very abstract way, one did not get any feeling that there was any concrete or practical way in which the line could be operated, and it left me with a feeling that it was vague and did not give us any line on the situation. I went back to Birmingham, like the other comrades, and did a lot of serious thinking about the problems and I will say quite frankly that until today, even until this morning, I could not say honestly that I was clear and definite as to how I saw the situation.

It is clear that I had not grasped the character of the new situation and that I had failed to understand that a new situation must of necessity demand new tactics. Now I want to say emphatically that I am in favour of the short thesis as presented here this morning, and I want to express at the same time a personal word, that whilst I am a comrade with long experience and a long period of membership in the Party, in expressing my opinion on this I am conscious of the fact that our comrades opposing this line have a greater experience than myself.

There is just one further point of a general character I would like to make. It was not lost on me that Comrade Dutt did not bring out in his contribution the fact that he also is responsible for the mistakes which the Party has made, and one had distinctly the impression that all the mistakes had been made by every one else but Comrade

Dutt. Well, I don't get that impression.

Now let me go on to what convinces me that the thesis is correct. In the first place I cannot see how we can argue, as Marxists and as revolutionaries, that a new situation is in existence which does not demand fundamental tactical changes. The policy of the Soviet Union for the past period does not make sense to me, as I see it now, if there was a situation of a peace front. Very well, the only thing which makes the policy of the Soviet Union sensible to me at all is the fact that the world revolution is on the agenda of practical politics, and that what the Soviet Union is doing in the complicated situation in which we find ourselves is assisting the working class in the other countries to be able to do their part in this respect. Comrade Burns raised the question about the chief antagonism between the capitalist world and the Soviet Union. The thesis puts a new conception on that. We have always talked about this being the chief antagonism. But I think that we have to see it in a new light. That it has become the chief antagonism in the world in a period, that it is going to be worked out to its final conclusion, and now the result of this conflict is going to be the solution of this antagonism with victory of the working class throughout the world.

Now look around the problem as you like, there seems to be no disagreement the British imperialists are concerned they are on the spot. But not only are they on the spot, but also the British people, the British working class and now the Party to some extent. They are on the spot because of the turn of the events. It is just as well to remind ourselves once again that the British people have a share in the spoils of colonial exploitation, and this is the reason why – not only the British ruling class but the British people and the British working class and now the Party to some extent, have looked to some one else to do our scrubbing for us and this is one of the reasons why it has been difficult for us to get an orientation on the problems.

Now there has been a lot of talk about a revolution in Germany and so on. I would like to say that assuming a revolution broke out in Germany, in a situation with

British imperialism still victorious, this would be a serious situation not only for the German working class but also for the British people. And the fact that this war has been supported by the British labour movement, and so far by the Communist Party in this country, must increase the nervousness of the German working class about the possibilities of a new Versailles.

Now I don't find a difficulty on this question which has been raised about the distinction between fascism and democracy losing its former significance. I could not quite see the point of Comrade Campbell asking about the difference in the internal regimes. The thesis dealt almost entirely with the external relations of these countries, and I think Comrade Burns missed the point. At least I got this point fairly clearly from the report of Comrade Dutt, and particularly the contribution of Comrade Rust, where these comrades say the balance of forces in the world have now changed, and it is now Britain and France which are playing the most reactionary role in the sphere of foreign politics, and that this is the reason why this distinction has lost its significance.

Just a word about the mood of the people. I don't want to go over the ground which has been covered by Comrade Crane, with which I entirely agree so far as the workers in the factories in the Midlands are concerned. But I think one can say very definitely that generally there is an increasing distrust of the government under Chamberlain, and there was never such contempt for the Labour Party leadership as exists at the present moment. Provided our Party can express a clear line which workers can understand, there is no reason at all why we could not rally the workers for a fight for their class interests, or why on the basis of the fight for their every day needs and interests, we should not be able to play our part on this part of the Western front in assisting our comrades who have done so much so far as the East is concerned.

Just a word about Party unity. I feel that we should guard, in a discussion of this kind, against any trying to narrow down the issues. They should be presented as sharply as possible. Here I do agree with Comrade Dutt



that anybody who votes for this resolution should vote for it on the absolute conviction that it is the line, or vote against it. Any sham unity in the Party will be dodging the issues, because, as Comrade Pollitt said at the last Central Committee, we have had surprises and we will get a lot more, and unless we go forward with the line with complete conviction we will get into much more confusion, and a more serious situation. I have been myself in some difficulty on this question of a new kind of government. It is obvious that hardly anyone believes in a government based on the Labour Party, but I think we have to remember the empiricism of the British people, wanting to know the next jump ahead and, with all the difficulties involved in this, it seems to me that we have to find some method of presenting some kind of government or some people's movement which can be presented as a practical task. I feel that that problem has not been made sufficiently clear.

Just a word about the mass issues. There is a revival in Birmingham of the tenants' movement. I was at a meeting on Sunday morning which was the biggest meeting of the tenants' committee since before the war. A programme was adopted there, a very big programme which is going to mean that the tenants' association will begin to play a tremendous part in the fight on a number of fronts so far as the Birmingham tenants are concerned, and I would like to see the tenants' associations right through the country now beginning to tackle these problems.

Now the question of the united front. It is clear to me that on the basis of the acceptance of the short thesis one cannot talk any longer of the united front in the old sense. It is impossible for us to consider having a united front with the labour movement, which is conducting a completely opposite policy. But I don't think that it means that there is not a basis for all sorts of common action in the localities, and I am not convinced that we cannot win over large and influential sections of the local Labour Party leadership for this line. We have all had experiences of the Labour Party leadership locally coming day after day to discuss the situation, as anxious as we are to get

clarity on it. I see no reason why we could not convince influential sections of the labour movement to conduct a campaign inside the Labour Party along these lines, and in any case to develop common action upon the immediate mass issues.

And so I would urge that, rather than drop our contact with the Labour, Trade Union, Co-operative movements, etc, if anything arises out of this discussion, it is the need to intensify our work and to get in close contact with the masses of the people.

## *Bob Stewart*

I did not have the advantage of hearing the previous discussion. It may be just as well that I did not. I am always kind of chary about these sledge-hammer demands for whole-hearted convictions and solid and hardened, tempered Bolshevism and all this bloody kind of stuff that comes in in the middle of a discussion. The only way you can know actually that people are against a line is that they quite definitely say so, and that in practice they show themselves to be so. The laying down of this particular kind of threat to people before the discussion has reached its conclusion is not a good way to start.

I am for the line, but I think also that we recognise that the short thesis is a bald and fairly correctly stated thesis, and just because it is called a short thesis, it is anticipated that it will be followed by a longer one. I think where we have fallen down, and I think we have, has been in that we have not been asking ourselves persistently and often enough what is new in the situation from day to day. Had we examined what was new in the situation since the war started, we probably would have found our feet without the assistance that we have received from the Comintern.

What is new? A non-aggression pact, the refusal to implement the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Pact, both of these things should have caused us to consider very carefully whether or not it was not time to make amendment to our line in keeping with this change in the situation. Also the collapse of Poland, the previous victim, and now, the treaty of friendship between the USSR and Germany, and the idea that peace should be immediately worked for, and that those who oppose peace would be considered those who were in favour of continuing the war.

I was worried when Campbell was speaking, because I thought, by the time he finished, it would almost be a crime on the part of anyone to stop a war and I don't think that comes to our international thinking at all. As a matter of fact, if we can stop the war, we will be doing a service to the people of Europe and the world in general. At any rate, we will be giving them more time to think about why it started.

**Campbell** – (interjection) It depends on what and how it is stopped.

**Stewart** – The point is that we don't want to get into the position where we are the people who don't want war stopped and that we want war at any price. They said about us that we were the warmakers and the warmongers when our consistent line was to prevent war from breaking out, and when it broke out, to take advantage of the situation to defeat our respective governments.

Up to the time they refused to go forward with the Anglo-Franco-Soviet Pact there was reason for our being for the policy of the fascists being the main aggressors and the need to curb them. Now what is to arise out of the line and the changes that have to be made? I must say I am seriously concerned at Dutt's contribution and Gallacher's contribution, this attempt to get the better of each other, rather than attempt to get the complete clarification of the line and the greatest possible agreement on it and the driving of it forward. This attempt to put one as being a masterpiece and another one as a very meagrely trained apprentice and so on. It is not the way to help us in a very difficult situation that we have to face, and to find our way through.

It is true to say that the changes that we have had are not the only changes that are going to take place. There may be other very correct changes, and we must continue daily to find what is new in the situation in order that we won't be stampeded or caught napping.

Campbell's proposition is that the end of fascism is only possible by military defeat. Are we putting it that the end of British imperialism is the British victory? The proposition as we see it is that the war, in consequence of the refusal of the Anglo-Soviet Pact, has degenerated to an imperialist war and in that connection we know without advice how we are to carry on in a situation of imperialist war. There is the great experience of the Bolshevik Party and ourselves in the last war as to how to carry on. And arising from the last war, what arose out of the war? The growth of the Communist Parties and so on. Miles and miles of reading and studying and thinking and political development there has been in the working class movement, which will enable us to find our feet and to find our way of conducting the war. But not conducting the war the way that Lee was putting it, that there is one thing in the peace and not two.

All the imperialists in an imperialist war are enemies, but our special job is to deal with our own, rather than be anti-imperialist as against the enemy and pro-imperialist as against the home government. We have loads and loads of advice that we can follow in that connection, many examples, but at the same time no easy or definite road. Here is the proposition that some people are prepared to face the desperate persecutions that are likely to arise from conducting the fight against the imperialist government and others are not so willing. That does not arise. In the Central Committee our membership is well enough known to each other and the Party, as people who are not afraid of anything that may happen to them personally in the course of the revolutionary struggle. That is clear and definite. At least, it is in my mind.

Immediately this line is adopted, we are clear and certain that it is an imperialist war in the strict sense of that term, and that that being so it does not matter if perchance our arguments or phrases should coincide to some degree with those of the ILP and so on. That is not such a terrible calamity, any more than if in the country there is a response amongst the masses apart from the Communists and the labour movement, a response amongst the masses

to the idea of peace now at the earliest possible moment. It will quite probably be for very different reasons from the reasons that we have, but nevertheless we should be able to utilise that particular sentiment against the war for our particular purposes. After all, we are an experienced political party, our experiences cannot be all cast aside. In the situations which are going to develop very seriously we cannot say for certain what the general attitude of the population will now be, when we have had only 24-hours notice of a peace proposal.

There are a number of things beginning to operate already, for example Churchill's speech last night, and there there is bound to be very definite searching of hearts in the ranks even of the bourgeoisie. We have said that there were differentiations amongst the bourgeoisie on the policy that Chamberlain had been pursuing on and that does not stop. That will continue to go on. Then again, are there no sections of the labour movement that are likely to respond to Soviet proposals? Is it not the case that in the workshops there is no serious antagonism at all to the Soviet Union having walked into Poland? In the first few hours there was, but after a little bit of thinking and after they saw the newspapers, with the peasants getting the landlords' land, etc, then a different kind of attitude began to occur in the minds of the workers.

And then if it came to the questions of staging a European conference, or an all-world conference around the question of peace and so on, neither Hitler nor Chamberlain nor Daladier are going to be the specific arbiters in a situation of that description. There is a very considerable body of forces that comes in, with undoubtedly the Soviet Union carrying a very great weight amongst them as it has carried a great weight in the policy of the International during the last few years. I think that while we adopt the line we should cease recriminations. My difficulty is that if we are not able to convince members of the Central Committee of the correctness of the line, then it will be a great difficulty to convince members in the Party outside of the Central Committee. If there are any who believe that the line is definitely categorically wrong,

that it is leading to disaster, then if it is put forward it can be discussed and we can make up our minds about it.

I think the line is putting us on the straight firm path for conducting ourselves like a Communist Party in the difficult situation that has arisen.

## *Dave Springhall*

I want to solidarise myself with the sharp presentation made by Comrade Dutt in his opening report. I consider it a strange thing that the first speaker in the discussion should in his opening words make charges of opportunism because a comrade in the face of greatly changed international situation, and after receipt of the directives from the Comintern, changes his position. I hope that other comrades who will speak in the discussion won't allow themselves to be intimidated by the charges levelled in that way against Comrade Dutt.

I think there is abundant evidence already brought forward in the discussion here that the Party, after it had adopted the fight-on-two-fronts manifesto, in practice showed a great left-sidedness in the carrying out of that line. As has already been stated, that fact is exemplified in the whole character of Comrade Campbell's speech here this afternoon.

I want to say if there is one thing that Comrade Dimitrov stressed very heavily in the discussion I had with him (I learnt a great deal from this conversation. No comrade who has a conversation with Comrade Dimitrov could fail to learn something from him) the one thing that Comrade Dimitrov laid special emphasis upon was the fact that in the new situation we must expect all sorts of sudden developments and surprises, and that it was a situation which would open out the most gigantic revolutionary possibilities.

It seems to me also that there are a number of signs that the bourgeoisie now see in the Soviet Union, and in the spirit of revolutionary ferment which is already enormously stimulated by the very facts of the war itself, but



particularly all the subsequent actions of the Soviet Union since they signed the Pact with Germany, a bigger danger and a greater enemy to themselves than that presented by Hitler. That is basically the reason why the Secretariat in the Political Bureau expressed themselves and voted against the formulation in regard to the paramount question. Because in our opinion, as it is phrased, it took in only a reference to Nazi aggression, and brought about a Party statement that was politicalised heavily for the old line of the two fronts.

Comrade Burns has spoken in explanation of what actually took place in the Political Bureau. Comrades should understand that the discussion took place in circumstances where we were fighting against time in order to complete a concrete statement for the *Daily Worker* in time to be printed for the following morning. The statement which the Secretariat had drawn up was brushed aside on the initiative of Comrade Gallacher, who came to the meeting fresh from his reaction to his talk with Comrade Pollitt. I am sure if extra time had been allowed there would have been wider agreement on what was the paramount question – the relations of all the belligerent powers with the Soviet Union.

That is why although Gallacher points to the fact that we have a somewhat similar formulation in our document to what is contained in the disputed paragraph, in our document there is also something else put, which in our opinion gives the dual character of what is the paramount question standing before the world following the communique which was issued from Moscow in regard to the Stalin-Ribbentrop discussions. In these circumstances the Secretariat agreed that its draft should be scrapped, and we worked to Comrade Gallacher's draft, because we had previously agreed amongst ourselves, the members of the Political Bureau, largely on Gallacher's advice, that it would be desirable and necessary to temporise and necessary to make certain compromises in view of the divided situation of the leadership in the weekend which was to elapse between then and the time of this Central Committee meeting.

Comrade Rust took up an attitude in the discussion, as he has already explained here, and with Comrade Dutt argued for the inclusion of certain sections to follow on, or to join with, the formulation of Comrade Gallacher, which in our opinion would have made it a stronger document and a better document. I am of the opinion that it is a weak statement and it would have been better if Comrade Gallacher had not come to the meeting straight from Comrade Pollitt ...

**Gallacher** – (interjection) Is Comrade Springhall wanting to suggest here that Comrade Pollitt and I discussed this before I came to the meeting?

**Springhall** – I understand so from your remarks. If it is not so I unreservedly withdraw it. I am of the opinion it was very unfortunate that longer time did not permit a continuation of the discussion, which would have given us the possibility to have made a different statement to the one that appeared. I want to quote to the comrades the reaction of the editor of the *Reynolds News* when he saw the statement in the *Daily Worker*, and drew the conclusion that either the Communists cannot make up their minds or cannot agree with the communique from Moscow. And already I have news of the discussion in certain Party branches in London on Saturday and Sunday, in which it is clear that the statement is not greatly helpful, to say the least, in getting clarity with regard to the new situation which the Moscow communique brought.

I want to say that we don't need the press cuttings from the Rotterdam correspondent of *The Times* in order to buttress up our views with regard to the dangers of the situation of a swing of all the enemies against the Soviet Union. But I would say that the declaration in the papers of the viewpoint of Stephen King-Hall<sup>1</sup> carries a certain significance, just as does the news in subsequent events that Lloyd George may yet revert to his former attitude with regard to the Soviet Union, and similarly Churchill in

this respect. And on this matter I think it useful, although no one has made use of quotations so far in the meeting, to draw attention to a short extract from Comrade Dimitrov's article on the united front in which he refers to 'the historical dividing line between the forces of fascism, war and capitalism, on the one hand, and the forces of peace, democracy and socialism on the other hand'.

Comrades, if we are correct in this, then it seems to me that it shows there is not the danger that some comrades have assumed here that in adopting the line we will be running the danger of identifying ourselves with the Trotskyists, pacifists, fascists, etc, but will on the contrary sharply differentiate our position from theirs, and will have no difficulty in carrying the workers behind us in this line. And I would like to ask the question: why is it that the Soviet Union is carrying out the line it has with regard to the government of Estonia or with the governments of Latvia or Finland, or that Comrade Stalin is talking to the Foreign Minister of the Turkish government in Moscow? It shows that the Soviet Union, despite the fact that it has succeeded in turning Hitler's flank and preventing him from making more aggressive moves in the Baltic on the basis of its own forces, and although it is counting on a growth of revolutionary ferment in Germany, is leaving nothing to chance. They have a deep comprehension of the new dangers which may arise from British and French imperialisms making a supreme effort to get Germany, either with or without Hitler, to go with them against the Soviet Union.

Also in the talk with Dimitrov, he spoke in the presence of Comrade Marty of the fact that because the Soviet Union had concluded a non-aggression Pact with Germany, that did not mean that the German Communist party and anti-fascist forces in Germany had to loosen their fight against Hitler, but on the contrary had to intensify it. He went on and spoke about the big possibilities which opened up before the French Party and then proposed that Comrade Marty should take up the proposition of the French Party entering into a revolutionary competition with the German Party, as to

who came out best in the revolutionary struggle against their respective enemies.

I think I did right, in reference to what Dimitrov had said about the big responsibilities facing the British working class and the Communist Party, in saying that our British Party would also take a hand in the situation. In this connection it has already been remarked that it is significant that Comrade Campbell in his speech had not a word to say about the implications of the suppression of the French Communist Party. If Comrade Campbell is correct about Hitler's aim in signing the pact with the Soviet Union, that it is only in fulfilment of what he said in his book, then if it is simply accepted on that basis, Stalin has been very gullible and easily deceived, but the recent acts of Soviet policy show that the Soviet Union has a full awareness of all that is involved.

**Campbell** – (interjection) I said that Hitler in his book said that Germany must never again fight a war on two fronts.

**Springhall** – I am wanting to make the point that Comrade Stalin has also read *Mein Kampf* and knows Hitler's strategy. I am trying to indicate that by the series of acts of foreign policy they are very alive to all the dangerous implications that can arise from Hitler having signed that pact and are not likely to be taken under any account unawares. But I believe, Comrade Campbell, that the way that you utilised that example, the manner in which you quoted it in your speech, gives further reason to believe that you still have the notion that the Soviet Union is only concerned to save its own skin.

Now, Comrade Campbell, further in the course of his very gloomy and pessimistic flesh-creeping speech, made it clear he sees only the most remote and long-distance perspectives for revolutionary struggle in any of the countries. On the other hand Comrade Dutt put forward, it seems to me with full justification, the claim that we have to deal with the situation where, totally unlike the 1914

war when it was only in 1917 that we got the big developments against the war, here already in the first days of the war, in the first few weeks, there is already discernible a quite different situation amongst the people. This has been referred to by some of the comrades and I don't think therefore we should pass lightly over this great difference, and the reactions and the outlook of the British people compared to the jingoistic frenzy which characterised the first months of 1914.

Comrade Gallacher, in his draft which he brought to the Political Bureau and in a part of the draft on which we were all agreed, and in his Glasgow speech, concentrated attention on the revolutionary discussion and ferment which would now be taking place in the German factories, and went on to speak of the great new impulse for throwing off the intolerable yoke of Nazi aggression. He also said in the Political Bureau that we have to recognise that the situation in Germany is that despite all the great tremendous repressive powers of the Hitler dictatorship, they would be powerless to prevent a discussion in the German factories and that actually is the situation.

I think that we ought not to forget either the revolt in Czechoslovakia. It is true that this was premature and so drowned in blood, but it took place in the first few days of the war and the reports of the working women fighting the Nazi soldiers show the latent possibilities there.

Then Comrade Campbell, painting a picture of Nazi Germany and its strength, claims that it has not been shaken by what has happened but is in a strengthened position, and poured scorn on the possibility of the ruling line of British imperialism subduing Germany and getting it to do to its further work for them. It seems to me that Comrade Campbell puts himself in contradiction with what he himself has written in the *Daily Worker*. I have the opinion that it is necessary for Comrade Campbell here to make up his mind once and for all as to whether he thinks we have been wrong in the past in stigmatising the role of British imperialism as being the main force of the international counter-revolution.

Then in regard to the peace question Comrade

Campbell, whose speech makes it clear that he wants war at any price, accuses us of wanting peace at any price. It seems to me we have a position very clearly in the document in the paragraphs on page 2 – 'Nazi aggression has been checked and limited by the Soviet Union'. We are not prepared to advocate peace at any price but this brings with it the question of under what conditions, what forces, should be present in the discussions in any peace negotiations and what basis of peace is proposed.

**Gallacher** – (interjection) This is a vital point. Comrade Springhall is not now talking simply to the Central Committee. He is talking to the working class. What does this mean in practical politics? What is the character of this? A stopping of Nazi aggression? Who goes to present or make the fight for the peace terms, Chamberlain and Co? Who goes?

**Springhall** – If we make the slogan, as we do at the conclusion of the document, for the opening of immediate negotiations, it may be a Chamberlain government going to some negotiations for peace, but also we could specify in making the proposal that the Soviet Union must be in on any peace negotiations and cannot be left out. Of course it may quite well work out in practice, and of course definitely we put it, that those who go to represent Great Britain in any peace negotiations will be quite other representatives than the Chamberlain government. It was considered not desirable at this juncture that we should bring forward the question of what kind of different government other than Chamberlain should be taken up in our manifesto. However, on this point, I want to say that I have in mind that the Central Committee may take the viewpoint that it is precisely very necessary to have something in the document with regard to the character and form of alternative government, and I should be very interested to listen to comrades' views on this point.

**Gallacher** – (interjection) Let us hear your views. You are alright on abstracts but let us listen to something practical.

At one time we had a draft in the Political Bureau about the character of the government. Until we know more of the peace terms emanating from Hitler we should not rush in on this question but that is a point on which I am somewhat uncertain and feel entitled to ask for the views of other comrades.

Then, Comrade Campbell, on the whole question of the fascist dangers. It seems to me he puts it in topsy-turvy fashion. It is in not fighting Chamberlain here that we will get fascism, and not by Hitler emerging triumphant from the war and producing its imposition. Comrade Campbell makes it clear that he sees political advantage for the working class and the Party in Britain and France emerging victorious from the war, although earlier he spoke strongly against the idea that revolution can take place in a Germany which is victorious. It seems that Comrade Campbell has come up with a contradiction in this respect.

Now, despite Comrade Gallacher's interjections, I feel it necessary to say a word about Comrade Gallacher's position. He jumped into the discussion and made a vituperative speech against the whole line of Comrade Dutt's report and against three comrades of the Secretariat, and spoke without making plain to the Central Committee just where he stands on the Comintern propositions, avoiding all the principal questions, and ending up with the declaration that he cannot under any circumstances work with the three.

**Roche** – (interjection) Comrade Gallacher stated he was against the proposals and did not wish to associate with the comrades.

**Springhall** – I wanted to follow that by saying that it should be known to the Central Committee that in the

discussions so far, Comrade Gallacher has shown no basic objections to the line and I would like to urge him to reconsider his attitude, in order that he could seriously help in carrying out the line before the Party instead of leaving the Central Committee in the situation that he feels it is necessary to make a dramatic announcement that under no circumstances can he work with the three, for whom he is prepared to find words of the utmost vilification.

I would like to conclude by saying that I am convinced that the situation in the world now holds out the possibilities of achieving in some major countries in Europe, as well as possibly in some colonial countries, these basic aims for which Comintern was founded in 1919. I feel further, and I am sure that other comrades will join me in this, happy in the knowledge that the contradictions of international capitalism have reached a most acute form and are opening the road for the working class bringing about an extension of the revolution which commenced in 1917.

### *Note*

1. Commander Stephen King-Hall R.N. ret. (1893–1966) had suggested in the *Sunday Pictorial* of 1 October 1939 that if Hitler could be removed, Germany would make a suitable ally for Britain and France against the USSR.



## *George Allison*

The first thing I want to raise is the question of the Central Committee. I want to associate myself with some of the points made by Comrade Stewart. Every comrade here, I think, with possibly one or two exceptions, has been tested in some way or another in what we would call our revolutionary movement. I can look around at everybody, and in a minute's recollection discover that so-and-so has been in Spain or prison or done some other work that stamps him as a first-class fighter for the working class. I may say quite frankly that I thought our Party had got past the Tommy Jackson-Walton Newbold stage. But the fact is, if I can recall anything of previous Central Committees, that that is the atmosphere that we are trying to capture as much as anything – where principles and political discussion were entirely lost sight of, where personalities and even fisticuffs became the order of the day. Our Party has begun to grow. To me it is a most distressing thing that we have got back to the situation where there is again danger of a divided Party, a divided leadership, of us being unable to appear before the people in a really sharp, clear and decisive way.

I am pleased Comrade Pollitt is going to speak. I think we have to establish the fact that quite clearly, in the person of Comrade Pollitt, we have in my opinion one of the best representatives of Communism in this country. I am convinced that if we can get down to the fundamental difference that seemed to be dividing the so-called ruthless three from Comrade Pollitt and Comrade Gallacher, we will be able to achieve unity in this Central Committee. It is of the most vital importance in my opinion, because I can entirely agree with Comrade Springhall's concluding

remarks. I don't see any sense in hammering on all the difficulties in the present situation. As I see it the present situation unfolds for us boundless possibilities provided that we have a leadership that is united from top to bottom, not in a formal way but a leadership that is united and vigorous in carrying out an accepted line.

Now I don't claim to be either a political trickster or a political genius. I want to tell the comrades quite frankly that I would not have known what to say had I spoken at the last Central Committee, and it is with great difficulty that I am trying to actually find in this afternoon's discussion what to say. The decisive factor so far as I am concerned is just this question of what actually brings before us the greatest perspective. What is it that can open up the greatest possibilities for our party? I believe that the thesis does that, but at the same time I think there are some things in the thesis that it is very difficult for me to swallow. We have to remember that there is a very large slice of the labour movement of this country who are standing equally against Chamberlain, against Greenwood and against the *Daily Herald*.

I am prepared to say that the influence of the National Government after a month of war is not any higher than it was when war broke out. This despite the fact that Greenwood and others have almost unreservedly thrown themselves in behind the government. This in my opinion is a fact of tremendous importance because when any government goes into a war situation, it generally succeeds, particularly in the early period of the war, in whipping up all the feeling behind its own line. The present government has failed to do that in a most skilful way. There is the failure of the Ministry of Information, and all these complaints from the American side with regard to the German propaganda specialists as compared to our errors. The facts are that the government has failed to capture the imagination of the people and has not raised one iota of enthusiasm for the war, and the opposition of all strata against Chamberlain is very solid.

That is why I believe that this phrase in the thesis has been toned down – 'no unity with the Chamberlain

Socialists' – Gallacher intervened and got it toned down a little bit, now we have it down to 'no unity with the leadership of the labour movement'. I am half hoping it will be toned down still a bit further, because I believe there is a great section of the labour movement vigorously and anxiously looking for an opportunity of fighting against the Chamberlain government and the crowd in charge. I can tell you of at least five experiences which have come to my knowledge that bear out this point. Noel Baker went to Derby last Sunday to the quarterly meeting of the Derby Labour Party. All the applause he got from beginning to end was the ordinary courteous applause. He was forced through questions and discussion to admit the complete bankruptcy of the existing Labour leadership, he was asked his position with regard to Chamberlain, forced to admit that the Chamberlain and the National government was declining in strength, and when he was forced to talk about a future government he then said that the future actually rested with Churchill.

I have examples of where Members of Parliament have come down to the constituencies for the drive against the Soviet Union, in every case they are meeting with an exceptionally cool reception. In view of these circumstances I am afraid of any formulation that shows the danger of us cutting off allies either at the top, or further down in the labour movement, that are going to be helpful to us in a situation where we shall require every possible ally that has any kind of contact with the mass movement in this country. To that extent I think the thesis is one that should be very carefully examined.

I also want to mention our Sheffield experience. This seems to me to be contradictory to Johnny's suggestion that we are going to be lined up with the ILP or Trotskyists. The *Daily Worker* carried a resolution in black last Friday, the resolution which was up before the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council. In that resolution the phrase that we were supporting the war was included. In the debate that was just the thing that had no significance whatsoever. Nobody made any reference to the fact. The things that were discussed in that debate

were the viewpoints in the resolution. The question of our support for the Soviet Union was brought in as an addendum. The question of whether we supported the war or not did not appear big in debate.

The big things were how to get the drive on ARP, to strengthen the fight against dilution, etc, and the line put there. I consider the decision was the greatest victory the party has ever gained in the sense that they were fighting on three fronts, fighting the pacifists, the ILPers and Trotskyists, and the right wing of the labour movement in what was the filthiest debate that has ever taken place in the City Council. It indicates that there is a large section of the labour movement closely identified with the position of our Party and which can be closer identified on these basis issues that can be developed in relation to the main line, that is, if we are careful in regard to the formulation in connection with the Labour Party and the Labour leadership.

I too feel, like Johnny, that we will make a very serious mistake if we endeavour to lay the emphasis on the perspective of a revolutionary development in Germany, and we cannot dodge the fact that it stands right out in the middle of the document and is used as one of the main arguments in the document. Our line has got to contain things fully of importance for the British people and not the perspective of a revolution in Germany. And in that connection I hope that this document, if it is not entirely withdrawn in its present form, will certainly be very, very radically altered in that regard. Because Johnny is correct. Fascism may have been guarded in the Far East. It may have been restrained. It may have been temporarily forced to step down and have another think, but Nazism has not yet been defeated. That is the important point. They are afraid of its strength, and a tremendous reserve of strength. It is true that strength has been given to them by the British government, but the strength is there, and therefore I would suggest very strongly that the references made in this document to them should be carefully considered and very considerably toned down.

The other point has been partly raised by Emile. The inference is that we desert Poland. Springhall has just

finished pouring praise on the early outburst in Czechoslovakia. Is there anything that gives us the possibility of seeing outbursts in that part of Poland which has been immediately subjected by the Nazis? Unless we have that perspective it is wrong to look for revolution in Germany. I don't see much about it in the document. I get the impression that Poland is to be left to its own miserable fate, and if that impression is created it does not put us in a favourable light, particularly after the stand we have taken on Spain, Czechoslovakia, etc.

With regard to the peace proposals, I think that this is where we have a big chance to get our line started. It is quite true that the Party has made some very serious mistakes in the recent past which possibly in a different situation would have discredited the Party even more than it has been discredited at the present time. To me it seems of the most vital importance to get hold of these peace proposals in order to guarantee that this is where the Party has a chance for stabilising itself. I don't see the dangers that Johnny sees. I think that if we fail to take hold of these peace proposals and to show that there is the possibility of opening up an avenue that is going to bring a cessation of hostilities, I believe that this is one of the things which is going to put our Party right bang in the centre of the picture. There is quite a lot of feeling for having a go at Hitler, but at the same time we have to remember that our country has only had a very little sniff up till now of what this kind of war means.

So far as Britain is concerned, in the present situation we have not started yet and the general feeling is if this is war, it is not so bad after all. Therefore there is no great resentment there, but we would be foolish to forget, as Pollit says correctly in his pamphlet, the people have entered into the struggle with no false jingoism or patriotism, and in a cool and determined manner. At the same time if the struggle develops, if our Party has not the possibility of being able to say that we have seen the other avenue for peace, there is the big danger that the Party can find itself in a serious position with every likelihood of isolation. Quite frankly, what I am worried about just now

is the manner in which we can develop our line with regard to the peace proposals, and further develop our line on the mass issues in such a way and with such speed as to guarantee that there is not the possibility of the Party being isolated and stamped on.

Dutt put it gingerly. He said it might be a long time before we met as a Central Committee again. But I tell you, as far as I can see, the psychological moment for Chamberlain and co. to make a move can crop up at any time while our Party is in its present state of virtual floundering. Because you cannot convince our membership that there was anything inspiring in Saturday's *Daily*. The only thing they saw was the controversy between Lloyd George and the Polish Minister. I think just to present an editorial on what we ought to do to help the French Party to regain its legality, at a time when everyone is discussing what we should be doing with regard to the Soviet proposals and the peace proposals, is just an indication of how weak and how dangerous a situation our Party is in from the standpoint of being isolated. It is not merely known to the Party membership nor the Central Committee, it is known to the Greenwoods who will be the very first people on the hunt when it comes to the question of an attack on the Party.

It is for that reason, in addition, that I see the greatest need for the Party being able to catch on to these proposals and the mass issues. I have no fear about the mass issues at all. They are coming up and developing constantly. I don't know what is happening in Birmingham, but if anyone has any idea that in Sheffield they are going to accept dilution without any bother, they are going to be greatly mistaken. The shop stewards' movement in Sheffield has been greatly strengthened arising out of this dilution agreement arrived at between the Union and the employers. The possibility now in Sheffield is of the Party being really able to come out. I admit some of the older hands are beginning to smell a 1914 again, but nevertheless there is a new school coming up which has the possibility of taking a hold on the situation and wielding a decisive influence for the Party in this period when the Party has a danger of

finding itself, if we are not careful, of being virtually isolated.

I think we have to try to make some estimation of what is happening with the Party at the present time. I have no indication of any figures of any striking character, but would like to know what the circulation of the *Daily Worker* is compared with a month ago, how the position of the Party stands. Are we recruiting to the Party at any rapid rate? I cannot report any big recruiting in the Sheffield District, but can report a fairly decent influx of Party members where the comrades are getting down to the most simple and elementary mass issues in connection with the present situation, and particularly in connection with defence.

Therefore I think that we can say we see the beginning of a mass movement amongst the people, but this mass movement can easily be dissipated unless it is actually hitched on to the main political line of our Party. I believe that the line of the Party as contained in the thesis opens out the correct perspective for us, but I think there has got to be the very greatest care in the application of that line in order to safeguard against any swing of the pendulum over in the wrong direction, any suggestion of heroics in place of real solid work amongst the masses.

I still say that the biggest impression I have of the Central Committee, at the moment, apart altogether from the fact that we are discussing really fateful political questions, the thing that I would take back in my mind from the Central Committee and remember, unless we see a change in it here this afternoon, is the fact that the Central Committee was hopelessly divided. Hopelessly divided on political questions and on personal questions.

I say now that in my opinion this room is full of people who have justified themselves as real working class fighters, and if it is not possible for the men and women of the calibre of the men and women in this room to get to grips with the situation and come forward united, then we cannot claim to be justified in endeavouring to lead the working class in this country.

## *Harry Pollitt*

I don't think any of us need get worried because hard things have been said, because in politics there is neither friendship or loyalty, and in political struggles it is absolutely essential that the thing should be fought through right to the bitter end. Nobody in the Central Committee was under any illusion when Comrade Dutt referred to the 'deserter' this morning, or the one who might be 'branded with everlasting political shame'. In the course of the meeting I received a letter from a leading comrade in which the hope was expressed that I would not find myself in the camp of the class enemy, and before I make a point or two in regard to the thesis, I would like to make a personal explanation.

I found myself in the most profound disagreement with the Communist International on the question of conscription and voted against it. On what I consider to be a major issue I felt that it was wrong for this Party to be entrusted to my hands when I so fundamentally disagreed and felt so strongly about what was a vital political issue. I felt it so vital that when George Crane was speaking today, I thought of him being brought in by conscription to die in an imperialist war.

And I put the matter fairly and squarely to the people in the Political Bureau the next day. I have known for some time what the drift of the discussions of the Communist International was in regard to the situation of the war. When the telegram came through on 14 September, as you know I suppressed that telegram.<sup>1</sup> Now after Comrade Springhall gave his report last Monday we had a meeting of the Political Bureau and then we came back to the Central Committee. I would like the comrades here to



know that I proposed at that Political Bureau that the Central Committee should adjourn until the next day in order to take a decision for or against the thesis, and on the basis of Comrade Springhall's report, because I said that during that week events would happen which if you had not got a clear line, would place this Party in very great difficulty.

So far as my position was concerned, it was impossible for me to remain as the Secretary of the Party in that indeterminate period. While the Central Committee meeting was going on I had a note from Cripps to go and meet him. How could I go to meet him, because it was to get negotiations with Lloyd George to make changes in the government? I had other problems the next day. They may be perfectly wrong now, but one of them was in connection with the leaflet which has been dropped now in connection with the RAF in Germany. How could I go to the Ministry, knowing that the International had a line, that I was opposed to that line, and be expected, as I am expected, to give decisions in accordance with the line of the International? And if I had made mistakes, then my mistakes in a period such as that would have been mistakes which, in Communist language, would have come within the terminology of sabotage, and I have sufficient on my plate, and sufficient responsibility that I was not going to take that.

Now in case the Central Committee think that I have influenced Gallacher in regard to the line of the Political Bureau statement, let it be stated that my two conversations with Gallacher last week in the House of Commons were conversations to try and get him to go in the Lobby against the Budget. Nothing else was ever discussed by me. Because I gave the Political Bureau a pledge that whatever differences may arise there will be nothing said out of the circle of the Political Bureau or the Central Committee, so far as I am concerned, in relation to this difference.

When Comrade Dutt makes the presentation this morning, I will only say with the very greatest respect, please remember Comrade Dutt, you won't intimidate me

by that language. I was in this movement practically before you were born, and will be in the revolutionary movement a long time after some of you are forgotten. Now so far as that aspect of it is concerned, it is finished with me.

It is being said today that we are discussing a historical fundamental change in the line of the Party. And this is true. But because we have this difference, comrades like Comrade Whittaker don't want to get worried like this. I remember Comrade Gallacher proposing after the Manchester Conference<sup>2</sup> in 1924 that if Comrade Dutt went on the Committee he would not. These things are all in the cut and thrust of the Party. But I believe I am entitled to put this to the Central Committee. You have heard many reports from the Communist International. You have heard many reports of discussions. I challenge you to ever remember hearing a report so bankrupt and devoid of explanation as that you heard last Monday morning from Comrade Springhall. Now I believe that I am as loyal a supporter of the Comintern as anyone in this Central Committee. But if I think these things I say them. What Comrade Springhall was presenting to us was not something which he as a representative of our Party had had any responsibility for drafting. He was only in the position of being for our Party what Strang was for Chamberlain.<sup>3</sup> That was all. And that fact has to be noted, because it was myself who stopped the Central Committee meeting to prevent Springhall being further embarrassed. When searching questions were put to him in the Political Bureau it was quite apparent that Comrade Springhall was not in a position to answer those questions.

Before coming to the thesis and the document, I would like to impress this on the comrades. When Springy gave his report he said we had to be careful to remember the difference between the Party where it was the ruling government of a country and the Party in a country where the fight for power still had to be carried through. I believe we have to remember that very important difference.

I want to say that I have given more thought and more study to this question of our tactics in war, long before it

broke out, than I have done to anything else in my life. And I don't write lightly and in public meetings I don't speak lightly. There is not one of you who takes the same amount of trouble with a speech as I do. I am opposed to this thesis, I believe that in the long run it will do this Party very grave harm, and I am more opposed to it after hearing Comrades Rust, Springhall and Dutt speak to it today, because in a very complicated situation, and in three varied contributions, if there is one thing that is clear it is that the fight against fascism has disappeared and fascism has now, because of its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, taken on a progressive role.

How did Bill Rust formulate the question? That the pace-maker and instigator of war, is Britain and France. How does Bert Williams react to it? That Britain and France now play the most reactionary role in foreign policy. How does Springhall react to this? By having a cut at Johnny because he was trying to terrify you with the threat of what would happen if we had Nazi domination. May I be allowed to say that we have been developing this party for six years precisely on that point? And when I spoke at Chenies Street in regard to the Soviet-German Pact, if you want to look it up you will find the formulation, that this Pact places on the Communist Parties the necessity for the intensification of the fight against fascism and not letting down on that fight.

But what have you placed before you today? You have placed before you today that fascism is not now the main enemy at which we direct our fire. In its place we now direct the main fire against British imperialism. May I say without offence, that I don't envy the comrades who can so lightly in the space of a week, and sometimes in the space of a day, go from one political conviction to another. I don't believe that that augurs well for a leadership that can command the confidence of the Party, the working class and the majority of the people.

If you ask me to define how I would like to see the fight driven, I have done it. In the drafting of the Central Committee manifesto. Now I am all against damping down on quotations and would not have slipped one across

you. I believe that that line is still the line of our Party. I would not have slipped one across you, but Springhall set the example and I will follow. Because this expresses better than I can the basis of my political faith and the tactics that I would like to see our Party developing. In passing, none of you can have escaped noticing that the Comintern magazine has, for a long time past now been taking on a stronger revolutionary perspective in its editorials. What Dimitrov referred to at the 7th Congress as using revolutionary language which had no meaning or content in that particular situation. The Editorials in the Comintern magazine have been increasingly tending in that way.

Months ago I wrote the political letter explaining to the Party what is fascism, what is the role of the Party and the basic explanation of why Chamberlain had supported Hitler. This is in the last issue of the magazine:

This fascist imperialism which threatens the independence and national existence of all peoples was and is in any case *unequivocally and incontestably the aggressor*. It has unequivocally and incontestably attacked Ethiopia, Spain ... it and it alone is to blame for the inability of the nations to continue to live in peace and for the fact that, day in and day out, the world war is knocking at the gate.

Because the efforts to build the peace front failed, that makes not the slightest difference to that fundamental characterisation of the aggressive role of fascism.

But now we are getting into that situation where we are in danger, as Maurice Cornforth is, of plaintively asking what is the difference between now and 1914, and describing the terrible things the German people suffered at the end of the war. It is true they did, Comrade Cornforth, but they did not have the destruction of the trade unions and the political parties. The Jews were not persecuted. All Marxist literature was not burnt. The working class was left in its position to resume its historical role. For me, the fundamental difference which you have to explain before I can alter my views, is to show me that, as I want the line of the war on two fronts to continue, we

have a better revolutionary perspective if this country is going to suffer a military defeat. I want some guidance that the revolutionary perspective for the British people becomes clearly and broader and more easily attainable when we have lost all the democratic gains of the past. If some comrade would make me clear on that then I am willing to follow that.

And as to this contradiction of the war on two fronts. The whole time we have been fighting for the building up of the peace front, the whole time we have been clamouring that Chamberlain should fly to Moscow, we have been conducting the strongest and bitterest fight for the removal of Chamberlain, and it has been the fight on two fronts.

Now in regard to the Soviet Union. I state my position quite frankly. The Soviet Union, and some of you are forgetting this, is one socialist country in a hostile capitalist world. And if no other comrade than comrade Hart is alarmed, I am. The world situation has compelled it to do many things which none of us expected, to preserve its independence and integrity, to make it increasingly difficult for any aggressor to make war on Soviet territory proper. I say it is a disquieting thing that that policy has been carried out at the price of antagonising very important sections of the working class movement. Because I know that that won't read very nicely when it is got back, but it is a fact. And those of us who remember 1920, when we had to stop the 'Jolly George',<sup>4</sup> those of us who remember the work for over two years that was put in to get that pulled off, and remember the situation in the Labour movement then, and see it as it is now, with the best will in the world, I cannot disguise from myself that we have to think and think hard.

I have done four meetings this weekend in the Forest of Dean Coalfield for the Miners' Federation. I am advertised as the greatest living authority on Russia – 'Mr Pollitt will unveil the events which are taking place' etc. When I am in a tough spot, I know I am, and if you want to get on to the Forest of Dean, I knew what my job was, my job was to explain that thesis, and I did it. But

comrades, I am honest. I spoke better than I have ever spoken in my life and I despised myself.

Now a man who feels so strongly as that, you understand, is somebody you have to take account of. You are not going to push this lightly away. I want to be in on this as much as any of you. It is not an easy thing for me not to be sitting at the head of the table. It is not an easy thing for me and it is not a personal thing and it is not a subjective thing. It would be very easy for me to say I accept and let us kiss and be friends and everything in the garden would be lovely. But I would be dishonest to my convictions. I would be dishonest to what I want to do. Smash the fascist bastards once and for all.

That brings me to the question of peace terms. Now our Party has never been against peace terms. Our Party has never stood for war. If you will read my speech at Birmingham you will find that I said 'let Hitler take the pistol from the heads of nations and sit around the table and the world is ready to sit down and discuss with him'. I went further than that, something that the members of the Central Committee don't know about, but I will tell them. On the Thursday, Campbell and I waited at the *Daily Worker* for Molotov's speech to come through. We are working against the clock. Hitler's points, 16 points, come through and nothing else. I sat down and wrote that these 16 points, with the introduction of the USSR being one of the parties that would have to deal with them, represented a basis of negotiations which made war unnecessary.

After we had gone from the *Daily Worker* and some copies had been run off, the news came through on the job that Hitler had invaded Poland and that changed the situation. I said some strange things last week in regard to Poland and I will say them again. I am ashamed of the lack of feeling, the lack of response that this struggle of the Polish people has aroused in our leadership. Because it was not Polish nobles that were defending Warsaw. It was not the 5th Column that was defending Warsaw. It was Polish workers and Polish peasants. And I will repeat now that I would have been as proud to have been in that struggle against the fascists trying to conquer Warsaw as I

would in the Red Army marching into Poland.

Now comrades, I don't place your valuation on the present relations of Germany and Russia. I believe, as some of the comrades are expressing it correctly, that the Soviet Union is not out of danger by a long, long chalk. I want to pursue a policy in this country that will give us the guarantee of doing two things. Helping our own people and helping the people of the Soviet Union. And please remember, even when you hate the sight of me, that I am taking my stand when the Soviet Union's on top of the world, so to speak. But I believe that the Soviet Union will yet find itself in a position where it will need what Stalin referred to in his letter to Ivanov,<sup>5</sup> what he referred to as one of the conditions which make the Soviet Union strong in his March speech to the 18th Congress, the friendship of the international working class.

I say this, and I only say what some comrades who are sitting over there have themselves said but won't say for a book. That the thing that has disturbed them in recent months has been the disappearance of internationalism in the pronouncements that have been made from Moscow. I believe that is true. I tell you they read hard. They may read fine for the people of the Soviet Union where they are in power. But how must they read to people who are on the Siegfried Line, and Comrade Rust fetches it to this situation that his concern was thinking about the poor German people. I tell you there is enough thinking about the poor German people and not enough about the poor British people.

I am alarmed at the prospect of this war going on and being lost because we are going to change our line. Comrades are now trying to seize hold of anything to try to buttress up their case. They are entitled to do it. And, Hymie Lee, much as I respect you, I will tell you what comrades have said about your contribution this morning, because I will help you and strengthen you; they think it was an indecent contribution, and it is very bad when that can be said about a comrade who is the leader of our Party on one of the most important industrial areas in this country. Better to take longer and think it out a little bit

more carefully than think you are doing the right thing before you have had time to think out the whole of its implications.

Now take this question of the peace terms. Am I against a peace conference? Of course not. But I am against losing the war and losing the peace as well, and if you are going to mobilise this Party for the acceptance of the Soviet-Fascist proposals, you are deceiving yourself if you think it does not leave a nasty taste in the mouth of many people as something they have never expected, as with the Pact of non-aggression with a country they hated.

I would consider it a victory for fascist aggression if Hitler is allowed to remain in control of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Danzig, the Corridor and the parts of Poland that he has taken at the present time. And I believe we would be deceiving ourselves, it would be wishful thinking of the highest order, I am certain that Stalin has not got such an idea in his thought, that the line of the Soviet Union has so weakened fascism that the revolution is on the order of the day. Germany is the last country in Europe where you will see the revolution – and when you so glibly talk about your revolutionary prospects – 1917 in Russia was a bit different from France in 1917. They only shot 17,000 French soldiers who mutinied.

It was not a bad thing to do, to call for a revolutionary uprising and discuss it. Hitler is economically and militarily stronger as a result of what he has got from Poland. Don't kid yourself that he has got nothing out of the Soviet-German Pact. Of course he has. And we are trying to kid ourselves that all the blows are on the one side and that is on our side. We will pay a very dire price if we did that. And therefore I am for the formulation of our peace terms, and Campbell made a point this morning – demand the entry of the USA. It can have a big mass appeal to the people of this country.

Then this point about the suppression of the Communist Party of France. Why are we so intellectually dishonest? If we have a case and a line that stands on the basis of political argument and merit, why do you now so dishonestly look at what has happened to the French



Communist Party and interpret that as evidence, and the trump card, that France and Britain have now become the pace-makers and the instigators of war? The decree for the suppression of the French Communist Party was signed last autumn as a result of the terrific campaign against Munich that the Communist Party of France carried on. The decree was meant to be put into operation before the war broke out, because the authorities really feared the danger of a sell-out.

In your propaganda and your revolutionary perspective, don't forget the 5th Column in France and in this country. The French Communist Party has not been suppressed because of the new imperialist orientation. All of us knew it was a second imperialist war with a very important distinction, that we were fighting German fascism. And I cannot forget what German fascism has done to our people. And if Ernst Thaelman is let out tonight it would not make one bit of difference to my approach to German fascism, and now it has provoked and organised and instigated the war, now it is incontestably the aggressor, I am for mobilising the people to get the government that will have the guarantee that if they cannot get the best terms which represent victory for the democratic countries, they will fight the war and win the war.

I know how easy it will be to talk about those comrades who wanted to talk about war to the knife. Why didn't you speak when they were fighting in Spain and knew it was all over? We are revolutionaries. We can afford to be a little sentimental, but don't now let us fall into 'the horror of war', and make this the alibi for putting across what in essence is a betrayal of the struggle of the labour movement against fascism.

Now some reference has been made to this document. I would give it in a nutshell, and say it fails to do what the comrades had in mind precisely because it is trying to ride over hurdles in the race. And for that reason it fails. The question of the slogan is not some incidental thing. I read it and it was the first thing I put, I got to the end of the slogans 'Down with the Chamberlain Government;

Forward in the fight for Socialism'. Now when the comrades drafted these slogans they thought about them very carefully. They formulated these slogans very carefully. Everything that this Party has fought for for years and got its biggest support on, the anti-fascist struggle, there were two things I noticed. No fire against the fascists there. It is becoming unfashionable to mention the word. What the comrades meant was, Down with Chamberlain, and Up with the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, but they did not put it in because putting it in might involve the party in some little trouble.

Now we are a political party, and the duty of a political party is to put in a concrete situation a policy to the masses that if the party was in a position to carry out, it would carry out. Now I ask any comrade here, experienced in public speaking and explaining the line of our Party, what he is going to say when someone says, that is fine, but what is going to take the place of the Chamberlain government? You are answering workers. You can't go into a theoretical explanation with these workers as to the fine distinction between a People's Government, a Popular Government, a Labour Government. The people want to know. You are mobilising the people for defeating Chamberlain and getting him out. You are not mobilising the people, because you don't tell them to carry through the social revolution, and therefore you deceive the people by saying 'forward in the fight for socialism'.

You know perfectly well in the present circumstances, whatever they may be a year from now, it has got no living reality to the living line you are putting forward, and you have to show the people there is an alternative and you have to give an answer and there is only one answer that you can give. That answer is that you are for the Chamberlain government being defeated and the labour movement assuming the responsibility of forming a new government. Give any other answer beside that and you are not putting forward a political line at all.

You are putting forward a bag of tricks that means nothing in concrete political terms. Because we are not rousing the people because we love to see them roused.

We are rousing them up for political objectives. I may be hopelessly wrong, but if our party was campaigning now and defeated the Chamberlain government, please understand comrades, I won't care what combination comes in, if Chamberlain, Simon and Hoare were out, I would say it was a victory for the working masses of this country in the conditions of today. If ever there was a time that the Central Committee should be considering how it can increase the differentiation in the ranks of the political parties, surely it is now. You were all on that line last December in peacetime, but now it is a life and death question, because even if you are going to carry out the perspective of the thesis, you cannot do it with 18,000 members, and cannot do it if you are going to be separated from the labour movement and the Trade Unions. Springy, you sent me a letter saying you had a conversation with Dimitrov and you heard how seriously concerned he was about the necessity of the delegation,<sup>6</sup> and the special problem he was engaged in trying to solve for us – how we can make a drive into the basic sections of the organised labour movement, especially the trade unions.

I ask the comrades of the Central Committee to be careful. We know the history of this party. Here is the phrase in the first letter by Dutt, as I interpreted this thesis, it means the absolute throwing overboard, as comrades have quite openly stated, of any suggestion of united front with the top, and we are back again to the tactics of united front from below. All of you can speak from experience, but supposing we had not had this discussion, last week I had been in some discussion and negotiations with the objective of getting a very well-known Labour leader to get and lead a revolt against Greenwood, against the present policy of coalition with Chamberlain. I cannot hide from myself that if we could get such a move that would represent a plus for the labour movement of this country. And therefore comrades you are framing your politics in the light of the concrete situation at the moment, and at the moment there is a lull going on.

The last conversation and discussion that I had with Dimitrov, because I was never an office boy, was a conversation in which Comrade Dimitrov explained to Campbell and myself for hours that one of the greatest shortcomings of our Party was that we did not know how to look after the national honour of our country. That phrase 'national honour' occurred time and time and time again. And I tell you our honour is at stake now. It is at stake as a Party. It is at stake as a people and if we can get a peace by a conference which is attended by representatives of countries so strong that it cuts Hitler's claws, that it gives Mussolini not a single inch of territory other than what he is in possession of at the present time, and affords the basis for the settlement of disputes from some reorganised League of Nations or other, I am for it. But a peace which does not give these things, I am against, and although it is a second imperialist war I am for supporting the war against German fascism to the limit in order that we can defeat German fascism. In the course of that struggle there are a lot of prospects which will unfold themselves absolutely naturally and in a mass way. You will never be able to organise that on the basis of this thesis. And a lot of comrades are talking, as they talked in the last Central Committee, about how we were feeling our way towards this and there was going to be all the emphasis on the home front. Still, comrades, be honest because half of you who have talked about that did not have politics about that. What you had was economism and you know it.

Now these are my views, comrades. Believe me it gives me no pleasure to put this. It would be much easier and much happier to put it otherwise. But they represent my honest convictions and I don't propose to be a party, for the sake of personal position, to hiding what are my convictions. Yesterday, in three meetings, Phillips Price organised it so that I was asked the same question. Every meeting I went into was like an ice chamber. The question which was put was this: 'In the event of war with Russia on the side of Germany, and Britain and France on the other side, will Mr Pollitt explain what the attitude of the Communist Party would be'? And rightly or wrongly, Mr

Pollitt said this Party would work for the complete defeat of this government, would recommend the soldiers to desert to the Red Army.

I understand that thesis, and because I don't believe in it, don't ask me for the sake of false unity to give up a position that I believe in. But I also tell you that if that situation develops, and either Dutt or anyone else gives the deserting stuff, then I will show you how to fight and you can take that as a warning, but I will never fight in such a way that I would make such a rotten implication against any of the comrades that I was in political disagreement with.

I will state to the Central Committee now, that I wrote to the Secretariat last week and I said if this line is put through and you want to embody it in a manifesto to the people, I am prepared that the manifesto should go in my name and I will take every knock that is coming.

If you want to have political conviction, Dutt, you have to learn how to present a case in a different manner to what you did this morning.

**Gallacher** – I want to say two words in view of the things that have been said in connection with my remarks. Comrade Rust came to me one day last week, he said there was going to be a very difficult situation on the Central Committee. Comrade Rust asked me to use my very best endeavours to help things along and to get the very best and clearest understanding, to save as far as possible unnecessary difficulties arising in the Central Committee. After the Political Bureau last Friday, where this document was discussed, I waited behind to have a talk with these three comrades. Maybe I said a word or two which was not so pleasant to Comrade Dutt, but I spoke to them as a comrade sincerely interested in helping them, and in helping the Party. And then after I had gone away, after talking with me, after discussing with me, after I had gone away, then they worked out this that Dutt introduced this morning. That I am 'impure'. A low, mean, despicable thing. This is what I cannot stand. I am opposed to the thesis, like Comrade Pollitt. But I will work with comrades

at any time, will assist comrades at any time. But the disloyalty that is expressed here, I cannot stomach it, I cannot stand it. So I want the comrades to understand that this is something which is very deep, this question of disloyalty to comrades that you are working with. And up to the last moment I was working with them, trying to help them all I could, and comrades seemed to be quite alright with me, and this is what you get the first thing at the Central Committee meeting.

**Dutt** – There is a wrong picture on this. With regard simply to what Comrade Pollitt said. He knows very well that if we have used very sharp terms it is because we are fighting to save his political life and he knows that this is our last measure. We have tried every measure so that you don't put yourself out from the leadership of the Party.

*The Central Committee adjourned till next morning.*

### Notes

1. See Monty Johnstone's introduction (p.24)
2. The Sixth Conference of the CPGB was held in May 1924 in Salford, Manchester. In the event both William Gallacher and R. Palme Dutt were elected to the Central Executive Committee.
3. William Strang (see biographical appendix 2) was perceived to have been sent to Moscow by Chamberlain without full powers to negotiate or decide anything important.
4. In 1919 and 1920, the British government was supplying arms to Poland to fight against Soviet Russia. The Jolly George was one of the vessels used in these shipments. In 1920 Harry Pollitt and others successfully organised London dockers to refuse to load the ship.
5. In 1938 Stalin published a reply to a letter from a young communist propagandist, I.P. Ivanov. Stalin stated that the final victory of socialism in the USSR was still not guaranteed because the country was still encircled by hostile capitalist powers. It therefore remained vitally important to strengthen the USSR's armed forces.
6. This refers to the planned CPGB delegation to Moscow cancelled by the Comintern leadership in August 1939. See Monty Johnstone's introduction and footnote.

# Central Committee Meeting

3 October 1939

## *William Rust*

I have asked the Chairman's permission to make a short statement at the outset with regard to our further procedure. I want to urge that we should endeavour in the course of the future discussion to limit it as much as possible. If comrades have not got any new points to contribute to what has already been put they need not repeat the old points and arguments and counter-arguments, so that we can reach a point as quickly as possible where we vote on the line of the Party and then take our decisions regarding the leadership that is to carry out that line.

I urge that on the comrades because it is clear that the comrades who will be responsible for carrying out the line of the Party must have the opportunity this afternoon of determining what is going in the *Daily Worker* in reply to the statement that Chamberlain will make in the House of Commons. It is undoubtedly impossible for our Party to go on like this as in today's *Daily*. It is absolutely impossible for a statement to be made by Chamberlain in the House and to have a reply that will be mumbo-jumbo, so that nobody can understand the reply. That will mean in effect the beginning of the disintegration of the Party.

Either we have one line or the other and because everything has now to be in the light of a time-table, in view of the Chamberlain statement this afternoon, I want to urge that procedure on the Central Committee.



## *John Gollan*

I had more opportunity than most members of the Central Committee to think about this particular point as I was on the Political Bureau when the first telegram came, which clearly indicated how the International was thinking about the situation. I want to say that in the main I agree with the thesis, but I must say quite definitely in the Central Committee there are certain questions for me which must be cleared up. The opening statement has not definitely cleared up these questions at issue as far as I am concerned.

The major question for me after the first telegram came was whether we were in favour of resistance to fascist aggression. Of course particularly now this question arises because of the position in relation to the British and the French people in the West. I still think that this issue is not cleared up. We can agree here completely that it is an imperialist war, that Chamberlain and Daladier are pursuing a war for imperialist ends, and in that I am completely at one with the thesis. I can also agree that there has been equal responsibility in the sense that Britain has encouraged Hitler, has armed Hitler, has to a certain extent directed his policy, particularly with the view of aggression against the Soviet Union, refused collective security and so on. Therefore when the thesis says that the bourgeoisie is not fighting against fascism or for small nations, again of course every one on the Central Committee agrees.

But I think the thesis points out, and it was not clear in the opening statement in relation to this, that both sides bear equal responsibility. That is to say, Germany, as well as France and Britain are out for European and world

domination. The way the thesis is phrased it is an imperialist war in which Germany is out for European domination and Britain is out presumably for the maintenance of the status quo and to destroy their most important enemy and competitor in Europe. It is equally clear to me that German domination means the crushing of the democratic rights of the French and British people, and also this has a bearing on the question of security in the West. We claim and claim correctly both in the statement before us and in all the discussions in the Central Committee, that fascism has been checked in Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union. It is equally clear if Germany is to maintain her position of European expansion, the opportunities for such expansion, the opportunities for such conflict are now limited by the action which the Soviet Union has taken. We are told here that it is precisely because of these things, precisely because expansion is now only open in the West, that Germany is searching for peace because of the big difficulties which confront her in this connection.

I also cannot agree with Comrade Campbell's summary of the position in which he says that British and French imperialism are only concerned with rejecting Germany in the West, so to speak. But I cannot get, for the life of me, the analysis which Comrade Dutt has made of German imperialism.

On the other points of the thesis, that there is now no difference between the fascist States and so-called democratic states, we can agree, particularly if we are clear what this section of the thesis means. I think in spite of the banning of the Communist Party of France, there is still a difference internally, and a very big difference for us, between the fascist states and the so-called democratic states.

On the role which the Soviet Union is playing, again I think there can be almost complete agreement in the Central Committee. The Soviet Union is playing a tremendous role in the interests of the Soviet people and in the interests of the working people of the world. There has been the extension of the sphere of social revolution.

There has been the checking of fascism. There has been the blocking of the major aim of the imperialists for a war between the Soviet Union and Germany. I also think it is quite clear that the bourgeoisie recognise in these moves of the Soviet Union one of the fundamental difficulties and dangers which has arisen in the whole war situation, as is instanced in the extraordinary attention which *The Times* and other responsible newspapers are paying to the effect of the Soviet land policy upon the peasants of the whole of Eastern Europe and the difficulties it creates for countries like Romania, Hungary and others.

It is clear that, in connection with the whole of our policy, the German-Soviet pact has made a tremendous change. But I am not satisfied with the explanations advanced by Comrade Dutt of the type of change it has made. For instance, it is correct to say that had the peace front existed, Britain and France would have had imperialist aims. They would have been in any conflict which may have arisen out of the peace front. Even if no conflict had arisen out of the peace front, the aim of the government in Britain would have been the aim of maintaining Britain's imperial position. Equally so, the aim of the people in associating with the peace front and supporting the peace front would have been for resistance to fascist aggression.

In other words in such a situation we would have had again the elements of the two-fronts situation and the two-front struggle. We are assured, and quite correctly, that the presence of the Soviet Union would have weighed in such a combination to such a degree that the genuine aims of the peace front would have been assured. This is correct. But at the same time, the fundamental aim and strategy of the British imperialists would also have been ensured to a considerable extent. Therefore I don't see so much how the contradiction arises in the present situation, and this contradiction has got to be explained much more.

Again, the imperialists in Britain are pursuing this war for imperialist aims, but the people are in that war and have supported the war for completely different aims. We, of course, cannot have a struggle on two fronts for ever, and I think the Central Committee has got to note a very

big extension of the imperialist front in this war in one month of the war, which requires a complete exposure before the whole of the masses of the people.

I am at one with Comrade Dutt when he says that no aims being stated by the bourgeoisie in the war means a clear explanation of their aims, in the sense that the true fact that they have stated no definite war aims show clearly to any people who analyse the situation that they are imperialist aims. We are also aware that the imperialist aims of the bourgeoisie can advance in this situation with the advance of the war, similarly as it developed in the last war. We also note there has been no concession of any kind, even the smallest concession to the people.

The Budget, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Munitions, you can go over every step which has been taken by the Government to prosecute the war and none of these acts are in any way a concession to the people. There has been no relating of democratic influence but on the contrary, the government has more fastened and extended the imperialist hold. We can also see that the course of one month of the war, the complicity of the Labour leadership with the Government, has weakened the labour movement. Again we have got to come forward to the masses of the people and show that we can only advance in this situation provided the working class maintain their independent organisation and activity. All these offensive aims are clear, which means that there has got to be tremendous exposure and propaganda of our Party rallying the workers for struggle on each of these particular points in the present situation. On the necessity to expose the imperialist aims of the Government, this is absolutely clear.

The second, main point presented in Comrade Dutt's analysis, again I am not quite clear just exactly what he is driving at. It is quite possible for us to have no sympathy with semi-Fascist Poland. We agree. But it is impossible for me, along with other members of the Central Committee, not to feel for the Polish people. Of course we recognise that in spite of anything the Polish people have done the line of the Polish bourgeoisie, the semi-fascist bourgeoisie,

has condemned the Polish people to this position. But there is the whole of the Polish people which have not been liberated by the Soviet Union. We are told that the explanation of the situation in relation to Poland is that Poland was a pawn in the game. This is quite clear. But what has not been sufficiently cleared up in the Central Committee is that the Soviet papers, who never write things lightly and who mean the things in my opinion, and deliberately state these things, not only for the Soviet people but for the workers of the world, have gone further than that. And in *Pravda*, Poland is accused of breaking the peace of Eastern Europe.

I want to get more into this question as I feel that for any explanation of any line to the masses of the British people, this is a key question. We have been stating, and I think correctly, that Chamberlain had no intention of keeping any pledge to the Polish people, in the sense that that pledge would maintain the independence of Poland. I think it should also be clear that the Polish leaders would know this situation as well as anyone did. The only explanation I can see of the position is that in the peace in Eastern Europe after the German-Soviet Pact of non-aggression had been signed, the deliberate intention of the whole of the Polish bourgeoisie was to try and embroil the Soviet Union and Germany again even after the non-aggression peace was signed. If this is the explanation I feel it can strengthen our position. But I am pondering over these statements of *Pravda*, I think the statements are correct else they would not be in *Pravda*. But on the other hand I cannot see how any of the explanations of the Polish situation which have so far come to the Central Committee relate, unless the situation would take that on the gravity presented by the formulations in Soviet newspapers.

Then on Germany we have a position which has already been dealt with. I am clear therefore that the more the war can develop the more it could develop an anti-Soviet complex. But at the same time I think the Central Committee should note that, for the time being at least, the British bourgeoisie are doing everything possible in

order to not come to a conflict with the Soviet Union. The statements which have been made by Chamberlain in Parliament have said nothing, the statements which have been said by responsible leaders of the British bourgeoisie have even tried to find reasons why the Soviet action was correct from a number of points of view.

The broadcast of Churchill is significant, and also the increasing tendencies amongst certain sections of the readers in the press for some further approach to the Soviet Union. Therefore I think we should recognise there are two tendencies at work. I would not overestimate the one which I have dealt with now, I think the fundamental line would be the line of trying to develop some anti-Soviet combination. But the questions are not easy, they are not straightforward and I think just stating fundamentals and nothing else at the present time is not sufficiently making ourselves clear before the British people.

Now on the peace proposals. Again I have difficulties here. We say that the statement in the *Daily Worker* on Saturday was a disaster. Well, I don't see how the second statement is a tremendous advance over this disaster, and I am not trying to score cheap debating points here but am only honestly expressing an opinion. When I asked Comrade Springhall to indicate the paragraph that would make such a tremendous difference in clarity, I cannot see it. I can see numerous references to the imperialist character of the war, but none of them which I think would fit in with the thesis to the same degree of clarity that the thesis demands. We are not for a war to the knife and a war to the end in the sense that any of the imperialists are. This is clear to the Central Committee. Any peace proposals advanced must receive our consideration, we must advance to the workers that they must consider all proposals advanced.

I think in connection with any proposals that we cannot at this stage just say we are for the proposals but not know what they are. I think it is clear the Soviet Union will try and get any proposals in the best interests of the whole of the masses of the working people, but I also feel that Germany will try and get any proposals as far as possible to

her best interests, which are imperialist interests. We have taken up a position in relation to numerous conquests of German imperialism, German fascism. Can we just abandon our position out of hand because of the new analysis which is made of the war? No. I cannot see how we can. I can see us accepting a peace as the basis for the settlement of these questions for the British people which did not include the independence immediately of a whole number of these places.

I cannot see us just saying that we just accept the peace proposals and forgetting all the things we have said before. We must not start to raise now complicated questions as to how the Polish issue should be settled, nor throw up the formula for the new Polish State. But I still think we should raise again and again our fundamental position in relation to these things which have taken place by the imperialists, our position in relation to the colonial question, our position in relation to India and so on. The stronger we fight for these things just now, the better the British people will press, and the stronger the peace movement.

This brings me to the question of the government. Again I am in difficulties on this question. The thesis does not solve this question for me. Taking the thesis at its face value, so to speak, it means we should not be for any new kind of government other than the straight 100 per cent revolutionary government. But I cannot think this solves the position for Britain just now. I don't think this is a correct interpretation of the meaning of the thesis. On the other hand we are in difficulties, because Comrade Dutt, so far as I can find out, in his opening statement did not place this question sharply. Comrade Rust says it is a question for more exchange of opinion and Comrade Springhall indicates a very great degree of uncertainty about the whole issue. I feel we must come out supporting some new form of government.

That new form of government can only be a form of government mainly based on the forces of the working class and labour movement. If we can get such a government for peace negotiations it would be a

government which would more correctly fight for things in the interests of the people of Europe. Therefore I don't think we can dodge this question, as of course it is dodged in the statement before us. I recognise the difficulties of the comrades in drawing up the statement, but nevertheless this is one of the questions which will inevitably follow in any discussion with workers.

I don't want to deal with the document. I think we must all agree there are numerous contradictory features in the document, and I don't want to repeat the various points which have been stated in the discussion beforehand. But I think that the key for me, so far as the document is concerned, is doubtful. I think first of all the document should show the imperialist relations, should show therefore the imperialist character of the war, but I also think that peace in this situation, if the popular forces play their part, can mean a peace which no longer leaves the door open for the Nazi domination of Europe. This is also a key and it is because of these things that I feel the document is contradictory so far as the government and other points are concerned. However in any detailed discussion of the document we can make other points.

Therefore I feel that the party at the present time should make our points in relation to peace in the broad way I have dealt with, expose the imperialist aims of the government, fight on all the home demands and fight for unity of as many sections of the labour movement as we can get, top or bottom, on this position. That I feel is a practical way forward. Maybe I am wrong, but that is how the thing strikes me.

I just want to say one word in conclusion on the leadership. I wish to say in this Central Committee discussion that I am of the opinion that Comrade Dutt's presentation of the issues was not a good one, was not one which helps to develop a revolutionary party at all. Comrade Pollitt has already spoken about it and other comrades, there is no need to labour the point. I think that we have got to recognise a thing or two which had not been sufficiently brought out in the discussion. It is not only this Party which did not develop the correct position on this



war. It seems to me, and I honestly state this position, that the war took most of the parties in the wrong way.

We had the position advanced by the Belgium Party, and in the report of Comrade Springhall in discussion with Dimitrov he indicates how certain Parties have now got to change their tactics, meaning that these Parties had adopted wrong tactics, and the parties mentioned were the main parties of the International. There is a weakness here. I think the reading of every document that was issued even quite recently, almost inevitably points to the line which these parties adopted, and again I am stating an honest opinion. We have Comrade Varga's quarterly review, we have the 100 per cent analysis in the *Inprecorr*, take the current issue of the Communist International magazine, take all the recent publications, and they all point in that direction. Therefore comrades I don't think any group of comrades in this Party are in the position to set themselves up as judges on this matter.

We appointed in the Political Bureau Comrades Rust, Dutt and Springhall to be the acting Secretariat and to fulfil their duties and responsibilities for the opening up of this discussion in the Central Committee. This was one of the reasons they were appointed – to assume the responsibilities of the Party in this situation. But I don't think that entitles comrade Dutt to present the issues as he did. The 'deserters' point has been dealt with. I feel we must have a leadership which is clear on this point, a leadership which has the confidence of the Party based on all the facts, and I don't think that all the facts have been presented. I am not suggesting that we should go into all the facts, but indicating my dissatisfaction with the way Comrade Dutt put points.

## *William Whittaker*

My contribution will be brief, but I want to say at the outset, that I am seriously concerned at the situation in the Central Committee.

My feeling after attending a number of Central Committee meetings is one of intense disappointment in the Leadership of the Party, in a situation of the character we have at the present time.

I support the thesis, and in fact, I think reached that position almost at the last meeting, and not purely on the basis of discussions here that have helped me, but on the basis of general experience, that I have had. I have tried to approach this matter, and appreciate this in the same way, and examine the impressions that I have gathered from the various contributions. When we get comrades in the party, with the experience of Comrade Campbell, and Comrade Pollitt, putting forward the points of view that they have, I feel that the situation is extremely serious, from the point of view of the whole leadership of the Party in Britain, and especially in a period like this.

On Comrade Campbell's statement for instance, that the policy of the Party must have been wrong over a period of years. I speak as a layman in the situation, but I have always understood that in a changed situation, we changed our policy and tactics to meet that particular situation.

I believe that the character of the change in Europe that took place, when the Anglo-Soviet negotiations collapsed, was so wide, that even yet possibly we don't appreciate fully, how deep and how wide that change was.

Therefore, if there was a deep change, that of necessity means changes in the policy and line of the Party, and the Comintern has given us the necessary assistance in this.

In this situation, from the point of view of the Soviet Union, quite clearly, the main enemy has definitely changed. The main enemy of the Soviet Union, in the international situation is changing in the direction of British and French Imperialism.

It is quite clear to me, that Nazi aggression has no existence in the form that we have known it, without the support of these people. If the Soviet Union can move to neutralise this support, that immediately means a weakening externally, first of Nazi aggression, and second a weakening internally, so far as fascism is concerned.

So the significance of the difference between fascism and so-called democracy on a world scale, has of course altered. I think it is quite clear, and I don't see why points should be expressed against this. The end of the Anglo-Soviet negotiations meant the end of collective security, and the rôle of the Soviet Union, was one in which immediately, because collective security had ended, it was necessary for them to stop fascist aggression straight away in the East. They have done that very rapidly, quicker than possibly any of us may have anticipated, and immediately they built up a new collective security in the East, which is going to be the basis of a new collective security in the West, if we do our job in these particular countries. I believe the moves made to deepen the contradictions amongst the bourgeoisie not only so far as the countries are concerned, but inside the different countries, precisely to discuss peace, mean that the British bourgeoisie, and the French, have to discuss these proposals.

This means a deepening of the contradictions internally, so far as I see the situation, and it does not of necessity mean that it is going by any means to bring peace, or end the war, so far as they are concerned.

They are not prepared to take any steps to end this war, in the present situation. They are bound to carry it out, from their point of view, to a logical conclusion, and the Comintern, as I see it, the Soviet Union, by deepening these contradictions are giving us opportunities, which demand the utmost unity of leadership of the Party in the situation, in order to make the best of these contradictions.

I agree, that it does appear that there is a weakening from the point of view of the Soviet Union, of the struggle against fascism. I see it in this way, that the Soviet Union has dealt with her fascist enemies internally, the Soviet Union seems to know how to deal with her fascist enemies abroad, and it is for us in this country, to realise that we have the job to deal with our fascist enemies, and to do that in as thorough a manner as possible. I am not expecting the Soviet Union to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for us, in that direction.

Now, just one or two other points. I believe, and possibly I can be given assistance on this, in the contributions of Comrade Campbell and Comrade Pollitt, the appeal that they make to me, was to weaken my confidence in the Soviet Union. That was how I felt the situation.

An extension of that in the Party, an extension of that feeling, means a very dangerous thing, as I see the present situation. I was only looking last night at a section in *Leninism*,<sup>1</sup> dealing with the October Revolution. I would like Comrade Pollitt to read that section, and indicate to me, where I have to weaken my confidence in any of these statements, which indicate clearly to me how a Socialist country will extend its influence by armed force if necessary, throughout the the capitalist world, and how this can be done.

Socialism has been built in the Soviet Union, and the October Revolution was achieved in certain peculiar circumstances, and the statement quite clearly shows that because of these peculiar circumstances, it will not be easy to achieve a similar situation in the West for other capitalist countries.

The strength of our bourgeoisie and the weakness of our various parties in the West in opposing them, indicates to me that whether we like the idea of our chestnuts being pulled out of the fire or not, this is going to be the situation. If we are going to achieve socialism in the Western countries, it is wholly on the basis of the Soviet Union, and therefore when the idea is put that we have to weaken our confidence in the Soviet Union, it seems to me extremely serious.

I don't like the feeling expressed yesterday, and I don't think that a lot of it is necessary, if we are really politically conscious of the situation, and honest and sincere in our beliefs.

(Interjections)

**Whittaker** – Alright, comrades can minimise it, but it is the way things are expressed, and how deep this appears to go, when comrades say they cannot work with so and so, so and so, and so and so. I don't like a situation like this, and it needs more explanation to me. As to why it is necessary to go to these lengths, or else we have a really rotten situation in the Party, which does need really thorough investigation.

On the peculiar character of the arguments that developed amongst comrades after the last meeting of the Central Committee, in support of two fronts – the idea of an imperialist war that had a sort of democratic character. It may be alright amongst the leadership discussing something like this, and they may be seeing the matter straight, but believe me, I have been in a peculiar situation, I think one that should never have existed.

We called off the Central Committee Meeting, we went back to the districts, and had to take part in meetings and discussions, and I was compelled to notice the arguments which were developing in the Party, to support our line of the fight on two fronts.

There was all this talk about imperialism, that it was an imperialist war, but because we had this fight on two fronts, we supported the war, and then we began to add something to our understanding of imperialist war, as unjust war, and so on Saturday, we in the sub-district, had a meeting; the statement in the *Daily Worker* and the offers of the peace terms aroused wide attention.

We were compelled to deal with that situation, and immediately the whole situation, the war, imperialist war, came out in the discussions. But what was the problem that the comrades raised? They could see a whole number of

matters clearly, that they could not see before, on the basis of that understanding, but the problem that was raised, and this is serious, was the Party in Britain. What was the leadership? I have heard comrades discussing who are the leadership, and what contact they have? In fact, there is the danger of the leadership in Britain becoming discredited, because it is clear that the whole support of the workers for the Party, is largely based on the magnificent rôle that the Soviet Union is playing at the present time, which is drawing wide support from the mass of the thinking people.

And as I see it, the suggested peace offers mean that the situation is very very appropriate for the Party to make an extensive drive, especially on the basis of the issues that are now in the country, waiting for the Party to take them up. The fight on two fronts has certainly weakened the fight on the home front. The situation in industries and throughout the country generally, is one in which if the workers could clearly see some leadership, the mass opposition to the government is really going to be extensive. I speak from experience now in the trade unions, and I know what has happened.

The cotton workers are notably bad to move on most occasions. They have moved already. Wage demands have been reached. The trade union leadership have had to meet, and their attitude was one that we have to make sacrifices in this war. That was the way they met it. But in badly organised factories, the workers have themselves taken up the initiative. They walked out. They have refused to work overtime. There are suggestions made, because of the difficulties of blacking-out cotton factories, of working daylight – which means, as winter approaches, the cutting down of hours, and the necessity of working even Saturday and Sunday, using the situation to get the workers to make sacrifices. Some of the most backward of the weavers' organisation have told the Amalgamation officials, that if there is any talk of working Saturday, they are going to break up the Amalgamation. It has shown us, if the party can give leadership to this, things can happen.

We have discussed here, the problems in the industrial

movement, and in the unions, the difficulties around it. Here is an opportunity for the party to get a new type of leadership, and a greater unity of trade union activity, which is of enormous importance in the situation. Maybe I am wrong, I feel that we have had some shocks in the month that this war has carried on, but I believe we have bigger shocks coming.

I am fully confident that the rôle of the Soviet Union is not merely one of narrow defence of its own people and not due to the weakness of the Soviet Union, but absolutely due to her strength and now is based on the development of the world revolution in the tense situation which exists.

In the Party, especially amongst the young members of the Party, there is a confidence that we have never seen before, a spirit of initiative to get into activity that I have never met before. Whereas before, we have depended upon the older members of the Party to draw in many of the younger ones, now we find some comparatively new members jumping into activity because of their confidence in the rôle of the Soviet Union at the present time. Despite all the difficulties they are meeting in the factories, they are meeting every night to discuss the situation thinking that what they have to do is to try and grapple with what the move means, in the belief that the Soviet Union is making correct moves.

So I am concerned deeply about the situation in the Party. I believe that the carrying through of this line is necessary and that it needs the united leadership of the Party to carry it through. If the situation does mean an extension of workers' struggle in the way that I visualise it, it means that very big things are going to happen in a short period of years and we cannot waste time with comrades standing aside. We want the fullest unity of the leadership and, given that unity, I believe the Soviet Union is going to give us opportunities of pulling our chestnuts out of the fire in a way we have never had before.

*Note*

1. Various collections of J.V. Stalin's theoretical works were published in Britain under the title *Leninism*. These compilations included *Foundations of Leninism* (1924), *Problems of Leninism* (1926) and other works.



## *Ted Bramley*

As a member of the Political Bureau, I agreed, in common with all the other comrades, on the draft of the manifesto which was issued and agreed upon in the Political Bureau by all of us the day Poland was invaded by Germany. Again when the first Comintern telegram came that contained the one key paragraph regarding the two equally predatory powers, I still adhered in the discussion in the Political Bureau to my opinion that the Central Committee manifesto was correct. And I want to say equally frankly that had I spoken on the Sunday of the last Central Committee meeting, I would have again spoken in support of that manifesto.

Now so far as Comrade Springhall's statement on the thesis is concerned, it is fuller than the original telegram that we had from *Pravda*, although it contains precisely the same line. I made most serious efforts to grasp the reasons for this change in the line. I made efforts in the reading of both Stalin and Manuilsky's speech, in re-reading parts of the *Short History* and of the 7th Congress Report, but I frankly and honestly confess that I could not grasp it. It was on Friday morning with the announcement of Soviet-German proposals, that I began to see that we were in an impossible position. I phoned Comrade Dutt in the morning asking if he had heard the news on the wireless because I was of the opinion that the Political Bureau should meet to consider it. He informed me that we would meet in the afternoon.

What was our position on the manifesto? It turns on our estimation of the war. Putting it briefly, we estimated the war as one instigated by German fascism for the conquest of Poland, for expansion in the West and for European

domination, as being resisted by the Polish fascist government for its own reactionary independence, but by the Polish people for genuine independence, as waged by British and French imperialism for Polish independence, but in reality for imperialist aims. The curbing of the Nazi drive to the West and for European domination was waged reluctantly because they had hoped to deflect Germany to the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union is pursuing an independent and neutral policy, preventing themselves from being embroiled and preserving freedom of action. I was convinced that sooner or later Russia would come in on the side of Britain and France. We conclude that workers in France and Britain had an interest in seeing the military defeat of Germany. That in spite of the imperialist aims of the British and French governments, the war could be developed as a genuine anti-fascist war and as a result we could see the way forward as a fight on two fronts, for the defeat of Chamberlain and the defeat of Nazism.

I believe that that would be quite a correct analysis on the basis of the 7th World Congress, Stalin's speech, Manuilsky's speech and so on. Because if you study Stalin's speech which we have so often quoted, and particularly Manuilsky's, you find repeatedly the distinction drawn between the fascist aggressors and the so-called democratic non-aggressive states who connived at the war because they continually retreated and failed to resist German fascist aggression in particular.

But then in outlining the four points of Soviet policy, Stalin did not again repeat it as he had done in the earlier parts of his speech. It seems to be now that the position Stalin was occupying was one in which they still held out the hope of developing the peace front, but that they were already preparing the ground for a possible change in the attitude. I think it is even more marked in Manuilsky's speech. The fact that they pressed us to accept conscription in May is still a sign of that conception. It is true that most of the older sections of the Comintern, proceeding on the same analysis, and as we had conceived it, made precisely the same estimation.

I draw from that the conclusion that the Comintern only recently arrived at the new estimation, and issued the line only on 10 September. I believe therefore there must have been considerable discussion and consequently I don't believe that we can expect to get thoroughly clear in five minutes. For me the process of getting clear is starting, and I believe will develop, and so for many other comrades.

Any attempt to condemn the manifesto, as was attempted in the Political Bureau previously by such comrades as Finlay Hart, with the quotations from the previous documents, is completely wrong. We are confronted with a new situation which really dates back to well over a month ago, but is only beginning to become clear, at least to me. The features of that new situation start outstandingly with the changes in the policy of the Soviet Union. The Soviet-German Pact at the end of August, the occupation of Poland, the Pact with Estonia, the negotiations with Turkey and the Balkans, and finally, the Soviet-Nazi statement, which raises the three questions, the call for the immediate ending of the war and the announcement of supply of materials to Germany.

In addition, I believe a new factor is the emergence of the definite Comintern line which I say quite frankly I appreciate as being completely in harmony with the policy being pursued by the Soviet Union. Further is the fact that Poland is defeated and I don't believe it will ever be put back, and a new and striking factor we are bound to appreciate is the rapid development of fascisation of France and Britain. The general onslaught on the working class which is taking place in England is also a very serious new factor. Not that we didn't anticipate that such things would come. We were aware of them, in fact we were ever aware of them in certain cases, in certain of the things we did. But I believe this raises the central question that the new situation raises for us, the same central question as raised by the Comintern thesis. That question is our attitude to the war as it is at present. Are we for conducting the war until the Nazis are militarily defeated or are we for responding to the proposals of the Soviet

Union for concluding peace? On that central question I believe a change in our line is possible and I will vote for it. I think the change is necessary because workers of Britain and France cannot fight for the restoration of Poland to its previous state, the intervention of the Soviet Union has settled that question.

Secondly, I don't think that we can justify the continuation of the war led by Chamberlain and Daladier for Austrian and Czech independence, and the overthrow of Nazism, with on the one hand the democratic rights in France and Britain being rapidly denied, secondly the very deep participation in the labour movement behind the government, and third, which is probably the most important factor, the Soviet Union itself being against any such continuation of the war for different reasons. Emile Burns was the first present who raised this question more than two weeks ago in the Political Bureau, which gave me food for thought at that particular time on that question.

The key has to be seen in the attitude of the Soviet Union. If the Soviet Union is for peace now it must be because if peace can be secured, in their opinion it checks Nazi aggression, equally it checks British and French aspirations in Europe, and third, it opens up greater possibility of advance of the working class in all countries. This attitude of the Soviet Union is based upon the conception that the war is an imperialist war, no worker can support it. This in turn turns on the conception that the distinction between fascism and democracy has lost most of its former significance. I asked the question of myself, is this correct?

We have to seek the facts which justify such a conclusion being drawn by the Soviet Union, and I did so by examining the change in the Soviet policy. Apparently the distinction was still valid as to China, Spain, Abyssinia, Czechoslovakia, and I think Stalin's speech in March showed that it still had validity at that time. As I have said, the pressure for conscription on us in May was a sign that it was still regarded as valid by the Comintern, but I think the first stroke in the critical note of that was Zhdanov's article and the long and unfruitful negotiations between Britain, France and the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup>

In trying to find the explanation, this is the only place where I can find it comes, namely that the Soviet Union found the British, French and Polish governments completely failing to accept a pact because their real aim was not peace, but was to deliberately have a war. They could have had peace with the German aggression, but their aim was to deliberately have a war in order that the Nazi aggression could actually be accelerated in respect of the Polish issue against the Soviet Union, in such a way as would have embroiled these two. That is the only point in which I can see that it can be said that they equally share the responsibility for the provoking of this present conflict. This means merely that we would estimate from that that the British and French imperialism instead of continually retreating had now developed a much more aggressive role for the purpose of provoking the actual conflict, which as it turned out was in a completely different direction. Recognition of this compelled the Soviet Union to reject the obligations which would have resulted in war.

In rejecting them it took advantage and exploited the inter-imperialist contradictions by signing a pact with Nazi Germany, using that as a weapon against the aggressive aims of Britain and France. This left the British and French governments with the necessity for themselves implementing the pledge to maintain Polish independence, for which they had done absolutely nothing. Therefore the Soviet Union's policy to limit the conflict and to strengthen its own initiative, which has now been done in the Balkans, Baltic and Poland, etc., is immune to dangers. In the way Comrade Dutt and Comrade Rust have emphasised, (in my opinion to a greater degree than should be) I see it as a definite move against the two dangers to the Soviet Union – the continued danger of Nazi aggression against the Soviet Union and the increasing danger of the British and French attempts to direct the war drive against the Soviet Union.

Nazi aggression remains a menace although at this moment it wants to draw back. British imperialism is continuing the war because of the German menace, because they are for curbing Hitler's drive to the West but

for maintaining capitalism, and against the Soviet Union against whom they hope to direct the war. But I think the comrades are wrong to talk of the imminent collapse of the Nazis. I think it is an over-simplification of the situation and will lead us into very serious mistakes. I believe it should be put this way. That so far the Nazis have strengthened themselves at the expense of British and French imperialism, but the Soviet Union has strengthened itself immeasurably more at the expense of German imperialism and British and French and Polish reactionary governments.

Therefore the conclusion is that we must expose the real character of the war and respond to the peace proposal of the Soviet Union. We should press for such peace terms as will open the way to preventing Nazi aggression in the West as in the East. We should recognise this as essential. We cannot be for continuing the war, nor can we be completely indifferent to the need felt by the masses for some feeling of confidence and security in the proposal made by the Soviet Union, which can help to stop Nazi aggression in the West as effectively as it has been stopped in the East. I believe subsequent developments will help us to show the possibility of doing this, show the increased strength and role of the Soviet Union as a guaranteeing factor, with the possible participation of the USA. But the changes of government in Britain and France has to be emphasised as an essential factor involved in the securing of a peace with that security which is required by the British people.

We had not seen the full significance of the change of Soviet policy at the time of the Soviet-German pact. It is this factor which made it increasingly difficult for me to appreciate what has been going on. I have been surprised, with other comrades, at each new event made by Soviet policy because I did not understand them. And I must say that at the Central Committee meeting where we considered it I felt we were too readily prepared to fit in that new development with the previous policy which we had associated with the Soviet Union, and failed to really go deeply enough into it at that time. I should have pressed in the discussion for a fuller consideration of it. I

mention that because I believe that we must do the same thing again in every important turn.

There are several questions which are still very unclear to me which I will raise. First, the distinction between fascism and democracy. I see the point made in contrasting the relative aggressive characters of German imperialism and British and French. But I cannot see this as absolutely altering our position of being for the defence of democracy in Britain and France and other countries and continuing our policy against everything that fascism stands for.

I say it is important, because in the London District Party Committee on Friday night, one comrade who has been involved in discussion on this question made the statement that there was no difference between living in Britain today and living in Nazi Germany. I think if such a thing comes forward to the people it is a serious position.<sup>2</sup>

I want to have no dubiety in my own mind about it, because already, as I have mentioned, wrong conclusions have come. And I cannot agree with Johnny Campbell who implies that to be against waging the war on Germany means necessarily the automatic emergence of German fascism into Britain.

The other question which is still very unclear is our attitude to the labour movement. Does this mean an end to our efforts to unite the labour movement? Because as guardedly put in the very brief report made by Springy originally I believe this is what it would mean. But I don't believe this can be meant. As I see it we are still striving for the unity of the labour movement. But we are for sharpening our criticism of all those leaders of the labour movement who co-operate with the Chamberlain government for their foul imperialist aims. But we strive more than ever before and see the necessity for building unity on the basis of the issues which we are fighting on and in the development of the struggle.

The third question which is not clear to me is the alternative government. You cannot go to any public meetings without this question being put. I believe we must stand for a government based upon our line of

struggle in this situation, based on the people, and to recognise that it would be a process possibly commencing with changes in the present government. I don't see the thesis as meaning that the next stage that we see is a revolutionary workers' government or in which that stage comes on to the agenda of the day.

The other question is Poland. As I see it the Soviet Union would have maintained Poland, as it was a fascist country, had there been a full reciprocal pact of mutual aid and assistance with the countries concerned. But that was not possible so they were compelled to leave the fascist government and state to its fate and, I believe absolutely correctly, to occupy the area when subsequent developments came about. We cannot possibly be for anything which suggests to the workers that we are for the restoration of Polish independence as they understood it at the beginning of the war. What we can and should show is that we stand for the self-determination of the Polish people, and that in our opinion that is a blow against Hitler, it is an inspiration to the struggle in the Nazi areas of Poland.

The other point is on perspectives. The thesis is for shattering capitalism everywhere. I think we want to know a little bit more what this means precisely. Because as I understand it the Comintern conceives a rapid acceleration of all the factors making for revolutionary upheavals and revolutionary situations. I believe these processes are at work, but that it still remains a perspective with a very considerable distance to go before we can begin to estimate it as being close to us.

In making the change I think we must fully recognise that it is a really tremendous change which we are making, and we must guard against the very easy acceptance which is already visible without the fullest understanding. I think we have to guard very strongly against sectarianism in its application. We must develop enormously our propaganda and must aim against the government, exposing its real aims and its fascist measures at home. We must seize upon a multitude of issues on which the people are feeling very worried, which are both political, social and economic



and on which the Party membership is already doing a splendid job in many localities. I believe we have to enormously increase the direct Party initiative in organising the activity.

Now on the final question of leadership. I wish to add my protest to the other comrades against the nature of the report made by Comrade Dutt. Not because he put the issues too sharply but because his opening was not one which was calculated to help other comrades, including myself and others, to get easily to an understanding of the problem. I don't think he was entitled to make such a statement without consultation with the Political Bureau of which I was a member, and I don't think the Secretariat should be allowed to become a substitute for the Political Bureau. I mention this because it would have been quite easy for Comrade Dutt to propose at the meeting on Friday, when we discussed the statement for the *Daily Worker*, a full discussion on the nature of the report to be made to the Central Committee.

Secondly, I believe that it is completely unjustified because Comrade Rust and Comrade Dutt and Comrade Springhall have themselves completely failed to be in any way self-critical personally. I know Comrade Dutt says he was self-critical, but his self criticism takes the form of saying we made mistakes, and at Comrade Pollitt, in respect to these general mistakes. I think it should be stated quite plainly in this Central Committee that if any comrades share the responsibility for these, I take my full share, but I believe Comrade Rust and Comrade Dutt have to take an equally great share because both of these comrades were in support of the manifesto, neither of them raised any question till the telegram came from the Comintern. When the first discussion took place in the Political Bureau it was only Comrade Dutt who really came forward to say that he supported that.

Comrade Rust had to be criticised by Comrade Pollitt for being extremely indefinite. Again I am reminded of the conscription issue, where precisely the same situation prevailed, where all comrades were for the line until we were told it was wrong, and then I remember most clearly

how Comrade Dutt was the one who changed very quickly after hearing the proposed changes made by the representative from France, and some comrades again were able to very quickly adapt themselves to the new line in a very unselfcritical way at that moment. Neither of these comrades are themselves absolutely thoroughly clear on this line as is shown by the speeches. Comrade Dutt's remark in regard to deserters, which was directed against Comrade Pollitt, is completely unjustified.

The Political Bureau takes the responsibility for any action by Comrade Pollitt, including his handing over of the responsibility this week to Comrade Dutt. And therefore I am forced to the conclusion that the three comrades concerned have been rather more concerned to sharply divide the leadership than to find the best possible way for a clarification of this situation at a time when our Party is in greater need than ever in its history of its trusted and experienced comrades.

The Central Committee should also express its opinion regarding the Comintern. It is in no way disloyal to the Comintern to say that it is a serious matter, requiring some explanation, that in that situation which has been developing over a period of several months, the leaders of such parties as the British Party and others who are members of the Executive Committee of the Comintern are not consulted on what is taking place. I would like some explanation of it and in saying so it does not mean that I am against the Comintern, or that I lack confidence in it or that I am against the Soviet Union, but it is my opinion and I state it quite frankly.

In conclusion I want to say that I was one in May who did a very serious thing in voting against the line from the Comintern on conscription. I did so because I remained completely unconvinced. When, however, that decision was taken, I loyally carried it through the London District Committee and the London Party 100 per cent. On this again, I find myself in a position to vote for the thesis, although everything is by no means 100 per cent clear to me. Therefore whatever the outcome of the Central Committee, I for one will work as loyally as I did on the

conscription issue to carry the line through the Party.

### Notes

1. This article appeared in *Pravda* on 29 June 1939, under the name of Zhdanov. It argued that 'the British and French do not want a real pact, which is acceptable to the USSR, but only to conduct talks about a pact in order ... to make things easier for themselves to strike a bargain with the aggressors.' The British-French-Soviet negotiations were still in progress at that time, and the article was presented as 'Zhdanov's personal opinion'.
2. Copy of letter received from M. Bennett, the comrade referred to, on hearing a report of the Central Committee meeting. 'I understand that at the meeting last weekend Ted gave the impression that at the D.P.C. I had said "there is no difference between living in Britain or Germany". This is not correct and is due to a misunderstanding arising from Ted's notes. I have seen him about this and he agrees it was a misunderstanding. The point I was making was mainly in connection with the foreign and war aims of British and German imperialism. I also said that in the course of the war the British bourgeoisie were more and more firmly establishing their dictatorship, naturally in a different way to Germany. I can't imagine myself saying that "there is no difference". If there wasn't I would not be able to write you this note. Will you please eliminate therefore from the minutes of the meeting, such references to me as were made by Ted'.

## *Idris Cox*

I don't think there is any doubt in this Central Committee that we are facing a momentous situation at this meeting in regard to the leadership. I agree with Comrade Rust that we have to define our attitude once and for all, because we have already lost valuable time. Once it is decided, the lead should be carried through without any personal feelings in the matter. I think Comrade Dutt was correct in emphasising the necessity of voting on the basis of conviction. There are comrades who say they agree with the thesis but are not convinced of its correctness. Comrade Burns and Comrade Gollan start off by saying they accept the thesis and then both make arguments against it. I think it is absolutely necessary for everyone of us to vote from conviction and from conviction only, not because it is the line of the Communist International. I don't think any of us can boast about having been absolutely clear and every one of us has failed in some respect to appreciate the tremendous changes in the situation. Therefore it is not a question of one group crowing over another.

It is true that Comrade Dutt changed his attitude after the telegram, but this is no crime for a leader of any party. I think Comrade Campbell should refer to the speeches in the stenogram and that he will be very alarmed at some of the expressions he used in the speech, never expected from comrades who had given a lead over a number of years. I think it was a pity that all of us didn't do the same as Comrade Dutt.

**Campbell** – (interjection) Why do you assume that others did not?

**Cox** – It is clear that you didn't take this into consideration at all. Speaking for myself the whole thing came as a complete surprise to me, and although I have an idea for my part that the character of this change is possibly why arguments arose at the Central Committee in August when the news came through that the delegation should go to Moscow.' I stressed at the time the absolute necessity for Comrade Pollitt to go and I feel it is a pity he didn't do so.

**Pollitt** – (interjection) We received a telegram informing us not to go.

**Cox** – I am convinced that Comrade Pollitt should have gone.

**Pollitt** – (interjection) I received a telegram telling me and the rest of the delegation not to go.

**Cox** – For my part I still had doubts at the last Central Committee meeting, but I endeavoured to find a halfway position, that it was an imperialist war but would be transformed into a democratic anti-fascist war. At the last Central Committee, even at this meeting, neither myself nor most of the other comrades realised the full implications of the new situation. All of us during the past week had read more and more material. After the last Central Committee meeting I was convinced of the correctness of the Central Committee line before Friday. I believed when I heard the news on that Friday morning that whatever doubts had been expressed in the minds of the Central Committee every member without exception would be convinced that this was the only possible line.

I had phoned this office on Friday morning and was told that while we were not to come out with the whole line we should work on the basis of the thesis that Comrade Springhall brought back. We had a meeting with the Cardiff Branch Committee and we expected to see a

statement in the *Daily Worker*. I was amazed at the statement which appeared in the *DW*. This was a disastrous statement and it would have been better to have published nothing rather than publish a statement facing both ways. It caused consternation in the ranks of the Party and had a very bad effect on readers of the *DW*, in many parts of South Wales. Did this statement represent an expression of the collective opinion of the Political Bureau and if agreement couldn't be come to as to the statement to be published why were not other members of the Central Committee approached?

**Bramley** – (interjection) There was no time. I came to the meeting at 2 pm and the *DW* had to have the statement at 3. There was no time for a full discussion.

**Cox** – I want to refer to the speech of Comrade Whittaker. I think he made an excellent contribution and that both Comrades Pollitt and Campbell can learn a great deal from the points put forward by Comrade Whittaker. When the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact was signed, from that time the peace front was dead. We still believed the peace front was alive. We believed that the war should be fought on two fronts, and it was then correct to fight on two fronts. It is quite a different matter now. If the Soviet pact had been signed by Britain and France we might have avoided war. If war had broken out this would then have been an anti-fascist war, but now it is quite clear that it is not an anti-fascist war but an imperialist war.

Comrades Pollitt and Campbell argue as if there had been no change in the whole six weeks. The position is this, however, that as a result of the Soviet Union's actions in the last weeks socialism is immensely stronger and is therefore in such a strong position that it can dictate a German and British peace not in favour of German fascism. It is not a question of what Hitler got in Poland but what Hitler aimed for and failed to get, and the effect

it is having in Germany. Hitler aimed for the whole of Poland.

**Campbell** – (interjection) The Soviet Union signed a Pact of Non-Aggression and left Poland out of discussion?

**Cox** – Before the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact the aims of German Fascism were clearly outlined in *Mein Kampf* and the plan was to get the whole of Poland. These plans have been destroyed by the Soviet Union and Hitler has failed to achieve what he set out for. He has failed both in the Ukraine and White Russia. I agree that Hitler will now have to re-organise his plans in the light of the new situation, but of course the Soviet Union is not relying on a paper agreement but on her increased power and military strength. As far as military strength is concerned the Soviet Union is the stronger power.

I think there is no doubt that everything that has taken place in the last few weeks has been to weaken German fascism and to strengthen the Soviet Union, and we have to see the new situation in this light. We have to see the situation now as not a question of what Hitler's aims are but the ability to achieve these aims. Hitler is not now the chief menace to the Soviet Union but British imperialism. Our old line was for fighting on two fronts, this would now mean supporting the aims of British imperialism and is therefore incorrect.

At the 7th World Congress, which was 4 years ago, it was emphasised that every imperialist war will inevitably develop into the direction of an anti-Soviet war. The Soviet Union has been strengthened but it is not out of danger by a long chalk. The danger to the Soviet Union arises now from a military strengthening of British imperialism. Therefore British imperialism and not Nazi Germany in this new situation is the chief menace to the Soviet Union. We have to work for the defeat of British imperialism and to help forward the revolutionary perspective of the German people. The danger of fascism

in this country comes from the National Government itself and our fight must therefore be to overthrow the National Government. I don't think we have yet realised the need to understand how fascism is developed in this country. It was pointed out at the 7th World Congress that fascism is not likely to develop in Britain as it has on the continent. The main problem in this country is not a fascist party but the National Government itself.

Comrade Pollitt in his statement of yesterday said that we cannot rest unless we have crushed the fascist bastards once and for all. Now this statement arises from a very strong class hatred which we can all appreciate, but if Comrade Pollitt wants to give vent to these feelings he has plenty on his plate in dealing with the question of the colonies and the conditions of the colonial workers. It is not a question of how many have been put into concentration camps in Nazi Germany, but there are even worse cases of oppression and ill-treatment in our own colonies under British imperialism. It is not a question of the lesser evil for us but it is our job to overthrow our own imperialist government and we can all give full play to our feelings in directing them against British imperialism, while at the same time striking a blow at Nazi Germany and in defence of the Soviet Union.

Our mistake in the last weeks has been to conduct the war against Nazi Germany and to neglect the fight against the chief enemy, the National Government. Our main task now is to expose the imperialist aims of the National Government and to come out against the attacks on the Soviet Union. I do not think there will be any great difficulty in convincing the workers of the correctness of our line. I think there is real opposition to the war. Unemployment is growing, conditions of work are worsening, prices are rising and the main attack appears to be against the workers and not against Hitler.

I think that if Comrade Pollitt had been convinced of the line and had put it over with more conviction he would have been more satisfied at the response to his meetings at the Forest of Dean and would have got a great deal more out of the meetings. Very successful meetings were held



over the weekend in South Wales. Now is the time for us to take advantage of the rising feeling of the mass of the workers against the war and the National Government. The war aims must be clearly defined and the question why are we fighting raised. The daily press make statements that we are now going to indicate our war aims, but no definite statement is made and we must take full advantage of the growing impatience of the workers.

Now to come to my last point in regard to our position. Comrades Pollitt, Campbell and Gallacher should review their attitude. I have more faith in Comrade Pollitt as a political leader than either Comrades Dutt or Springhall, and without Comrade Pollitt in the leadership we should be working under a serious handicap. But if Comrade Pollitt is not convinced of the line then it is better to have a clear line without him, because this would be even more disastrous.

I would also like to point out to Comrade Pollitt that having left the leadership of the Party it is even more difficult to come back, if ever, if he is not convinced of the line of the Party. If however Comrade Pollitt is not convinced of the correctness of the line we will have to consider arranging for him to have a talk in Moscow. It is absolutely essential to have a very clear statement in the *Daily Worker* and it is therefore necessary for us to vote and take a decision, if possible this morning, as the situation is such that we can no longer delay in stating very clearly our line.

## *Peter Kerrigan*

I find myself in a very serious situation in this discussion, and I want to try and speak as frankly as possible under the circumstances. I have been thinking over the situation that we faced over the last week and I want to put my case here to the Central Committee, and on the basis of that try and show why my opinions have been changed as I undoubtedly find they changed, not from last week or not from yesterday, but today. Because I came here firmly intending to vote against the thesis that was presented yesterday. I stated only yesterday to comrades in the course of conversation that I was intending to vote against the thesis. I still find myself in the difficulty that there are some points on which I am quite unclear, but I don't feel they justify me now in taking a stand against the thesis which is put forward. But I want to put the points forward, and see how it is possible to explain the way I have reacted on this question.

First of all, I still cannot agree that we were wrong to put forward the proposition of the fight on two fronts. And I also want to say that it may be thinking empirically, but when we argued for the defeat of our own government, as I understand it this means the defeat of the country militarily, that is to say a defeat militarily and this always means to me a victory for German fascism. In answer to the point of argument put up by Comrade Lee yesterday I cannot understand how the transfer say, of British colonies, which is the demand of Hitler, would be an advantage to the people of the colonies, nor yet a strengthening of the fight against fascism and a weakening of fascism as such.

**Lee** – (interjection) Do you think I was for handing over British colonies to German imperialism? It is of advantage of all the people of the oppressed countries for their governments to be defeated. Therefore we have to work for their defeat.

**Cox** – But I also see the possibility in the defeat of British imperialism for the military victory of German fascism. It is the thing I put last week and what I have had in my mind, right up to the moment. But I believe that what I have been missing, and what I am trying to find at the moment, is the fact that the military defeat of Britain can also be accompanied by not a process of victory for German fascism over Britain. If there is this impression, then I want to tell you comrades it is a very difficult thing for me because I feel strongly on this situation. Therefore is it possible to accomplish the two things together? The defeat of British imperialism and at the same time not the going over of British colonies and British possessions into German fascism?

Although the thesis stated the previous division of states into fascist and so-called democratic states has now lost its former sense, it seems to me that we can only accept that in relation to world relations as between countries and nations and not as the situation exists inside the states. Although I am prepared to admit, and I believe we are making a mistake if we don't appreciate it, that there has been a tremendous loss of liberty in this country over the past month, nobody is going to convince me that that means that we have reached a stage where fascism has developed in this country.

I think to use the argument that the French Communist Party has been suppressed officially or that we may be attacked, that we have reached the stage of fascism in this country, would also be a mistake. If you did that in the line we are accepting at the moment, we will go into the fight handicapped, because one of the most important things we have to do is to fight to defend our liberties in Great Britain, and we have many advantages over the fascists.

The other thing is that I am not convinced we were wrong in all our estimation, and this is where I have some difficulty in regard to the thesis. As I understand it, the way it has been put by Comrade Dutt and the way we have to accept it, the change took place at the signing of the Soviet-German Pact. That changed the situation and therefore in the new situation Poland was not a country that was accepting or carrying through a progressive role, and the defence of Poland in that situation cannot be justified as was the defence of Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia. That has been the very big thing with me, because I have put Poland on the same basis in its fight against German fascism as the other countries. I understand what happened to the other countries as a result of defeat. Austria was a semi-fascist country like Poland, and therefore there was the similarity which I could not get over.

This is also a stumbling block to me which must be explained in the course of the meeting. We said that Chamberlain was trying to do a sell-out. I remember Gallacher explained it to a Glasgow D.P.C. meeting, right up to the Saturday night or the Sunday, and we were expecting that sell-out. Now what was going to be our reaction to it? What was the next point going to be? That Chamberlain did not fulfil his obligation to Poland and therefore it helped fascism and in a measure it did help fascism. This was a betrayal of us as well as the Polish people.

What I have not been able to reconcile is this. If we were for peace at the time of the signing of the Soviet-German Pact, that meant that we were not justified in attacking Chamberlain. We would not be justified in coming out and denouncing him because the logic of our denunciation would have been the demand that Chamberlain ought to have fulfilled the agreement that he had given to Poland. That is what I have not been able to get over, and I still yet have not got a convincing answer.

What has been one of the main things which has helped me to change my basic line on this question? It is the fact that I have always justified the Soviet Union in every

action that the Soviet Union has taken. That does not mean to say that I have expected all the changes that have taken place or anticipated them. As a matter of fact I was flabbergasted, quite frankly, when the Soviet Union marched into Poland. I remember going to Gallacher, I remember getting into touch with the *Daily Worker*, I tried to get in touch with Pollitt, to get advice on the arguments that I would be able to put in that situation, which shows that I was not understanding the situation in that respect. I suppose I was like very many of the comrades. That is why I cannot accept Johnny's points on the peace. Because it seems to me that we cannot be for a fight to the death, or that we continue because it is necessary for us to save the German workers and defeat fascism.

That is why I believe it is absolutely necessary for us to say that the peace proposals must be considered, and that anything that the Soviet Union is involved in means that we must give support. But on the other hand it is not just plain sailing, we cannot say that peace proposals which Germany is a party to, even in association with the Soviet Union, are the kind of peace proposals which are going to strengthen democracy, in the sense that if peace is arrived at it is not going to be a peace advantageous to German fascism.

Now on this question of the home front. One of the things which has made it difficult for me to feel we were wrong in connection with the fight on two fronts, is that we didn't do a bad job in the district on the outbreak of the war, on the fight on two fronts, I don't believe our District gave up the fight on the home front. I believe we got a very good mobilisation. We got out the manifesto in big numbers, but not only did we get out the manifesto in big numbers, we had meetings in the factories also on the issues.

Cowe will tell you that in Glasgow some of the best work was done, was done by the Party in the fight on the evacuation situation, on the defence of the women and children, on the economic issues. I cannot see in our District where we slowed up on the fight on the home front to any extent, although I will say this, that over the

last week we made a big mistake in not having a discussion. Although probably if we had had a discussion last week I would have come out 100 per cent against the line of the thesis. But my attitude would not have been the most important thing, the most important thing for us would have been the fact that we would have had a party on the line going forward, possibly the line accepted by the majority of the comrades in the meeting today.

Comrade Pollitt in the course of the discussion here yesterday was correct when he said we are not in the position today where there is a wholesale acceptance by the masses of the workers of the actions of the Soviet Union as correct. Let us take the position on the thesis with our eyes open. I have been at workgates and dockers' meetings in Glasgow, and have had interruptions, even in a factory where I worked as an apprentice, where they talked to me, and where I met very considerable hostility amongst the workers. I believe, however, it is always possible to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of the line of the Soviet Union and that is the sheet anchor now in this present situation.

I want to be quite frank, comrades, and this is the point I want to make about the presentation as made by both the document and Comrade Dutt, that I still feel there is something wrong with a position where inside the Party we go the whole hog on the line of us being against this war as an imperialist war, but are not able to come out to the workers and explain it to the workers, and that is the impression I get from the document. It may mean eating our words, but far better to have to do it if we believe we are wrong, than to start some very long-drawn-out process which will immobilise the Party. That means we need to get clarity into the Party as quickly as possible and start making our public declarations and admit it, because I don't see how we can get round the fact that we issued a manifesto. We have to admit it was wrong or else we are in an impossible position and that is the thing I have not been able to get round in the course of my trying to think the proposition out.

Now I have made what is not a very coherent statement

of my position in this present discussion, and that is not the best thing for a comrade who is in a leading position in the Party. I want to say that one of the things which influenced me very considerably was the kind of statement which Comrade Whittaker made in the meeting, because Whittaker's approach to the thing was grasping on some of the main essential things. I also want to say quite frankly that I have been influenced in the attitude to some extent by my personal feelings, that I have the feeling that there is something very wrong in the Party if the position as I understand it quite clearly means losing the services of comrades like Comrades Pollitt and Campbell in the leadership of the Party. This is a very big thing indeed for me and I am stating it quite frankly.

The last point I want to make is this. Having stated that, and tried to give impression of what has been going on in my mind on this question, I still feel that it may be incorrect for me to vote for the thesis. I still feel these doubts in my mind that I am not a comrade who is in the position of being 100 per cent for the line of the thesis, in the sense that I have complete conviction. I believe basically I must accept the thesis because I am convinced that the Soviet Union under no circumstances will ever do anything that is against the interests not only of the Soviet people but of the people of the whole world, and that is the test, along with the developments that have taken place with regard to the peace proposals. But I want to say that I would be dishonest here today if I did not also express these very serious difficulties that I have both with regard to my estimation of the line on two fronts, with regard to what would have been our reaction on the Polish question, and my understanding of the fact that we were completely wrong from the time of the signing of the German-Soviet Pact making a new situation.

## *Marian Jessop*

I would definitely have spoken on the line of objection to the point of view put forward by Dutt. I should have done it from one point of view. The situation so far as this country was concerned was that Hitler appeared to be our main enemy.

Two main thoughts concern me. The first was – is it still true to say that Hitler remains the main enemy – and also from Springhall's report of what Comrade Dimitrov said, this war opened up an entirely new era for the working class of the world. Now if this is true, and the point in my mind is that it is true, a new era has been opened up by the fact of this war, and I agree with Comrade Whittaker in relation to it. It is true of every comrade on the Central Committee without exception, that none of us understood the true significance of the signing of the Pact between Germany and Russia and the significance of the breaking down of the negotiations for the peace pact, and the concrete expression by the Soviet Union of the fact that the hope for a peace front to be built was impossible. Therefore it seems to me that what we have to analyse, is can we continue to say that this is an imperialist war, but an imperialist war with a difference? An imperialist war with the difference that fascism exists.

To me it seems that our line towards fascism was that it was the spearhead of aggression, and we have to take into consideration what difference the signing of the Pact and the moves of the Soviet Union have made in relation to smashing this spearhead of aggression which we said was finally directed against the Soviet Union. All the acquiring of the East of Europe that was made by Chamberlain was definitely made with the point in mind of using the



German fascists as the spearhead of aggression against the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet Union protected itself, because in the sense that we were unable to remove the Chamberlain and Daladier governments, it was essential for the Soviet Union quite correctly to take any steps that were necessary to preserve the Soviet Union. I cannot separate the maintenance of the Soviet Union from the interests of the international working class.

I think we have to show quite definitely that any defeat of the Soviet Union would be a major defeat for the international working class. In relation to this we can fully say that the Soviet Union moved extremely rapidly and extremely well.

Now it does seem that the Soviet Union has barred the way to fascist aggression in the East of Europe and the South-East of Europe. With the troops on the Romanian border, the Friday before the advance of the Soviet Union into Poland, a comrade told me from the German wireless that already the military authorities were announcing to the Romanian people that they should get inside their houses because the German army would be occupying the Polish Ukraine in 36 hours.

I don't see that the Soviet Union did not discuss Poland when they were discussing the non-aggression pact, but I do feel there was not the agreement reached in relation to the advance of the Soviet Union. But I am not concerned whether it was or not. The only thing I am concerned about is that there has been the extension of the Soviet territory, that it covers now another 16 million people and that the Soviet Union is immeasurably stronger as a result of it.

It is true that Hitler has signed this Pact, obviously because he wants to get a certain strengthening from it, in the sense that he does not want the war on two fronts, and it is also a recognition that he cannot play the game that British and French imperialism strengthened him to play. He recognises it would be a disaster for fascism to attack the Soviet Union. He far prefers, if he has to fight, that it is a war in the direction of the West. I think this is something we have to rejoice about and feel proud about because the

Soviet Union has shown that it has got this strength to repel what has been the intention of German fascism to a certain stage, as it has been used in the hands of British and French imperialism. The blows which the Soviet Union is delivering are twofold, against Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe, and a blow against the plans of British and French imperialism, because this war is a peculiar war, it is peculiar to the workers.

I think we have something still to remember as the Soviet Union is bringing forward its peace plans and that is, to me, Chamberlain is a class fighter, he is fighting for the interests of his class. It seems to me that if he acknowledges that he cannot use German fascism against the Soviet Union he is in essence acknowledging the ending of capitalist domination. I think there definite emphasis should have been made, because there is no war in actual fact going on in the Western Front. Comrade Roche has reported from the factories that it is a funny war where all the bombing is with leaflets. It is a situation where the workers feel there is something wrong.

I believe that Chamberlain and Daladier are making moves in order to try again and find some fashion where they could utilise Germany against the Soviet Union and the peace proposals of the Soviet Union. I am convinced of this, that there are two entirely contradictory thoughts in the minds of the people of this country. They want the defeat of Hitler, and everything that Hitler represents they hate. Not in the same way that Chamberlain represents Hitler, but the suppression of the trade unions etc. But they also want peace, but they want the sort of peace which means that fascism can no longer be the aggressor, can no longer imperil them, can no longer open the situation where they feel they are going to be called upon to face the war in a worsened situation.

I think the Soviet Union is also trying to build up a system of collective security. I have no illusions that the Soviet Union is going to call for the ending of Nazi domination in Czechoslovakia, Austria and Poland and so on, but I am convinced of this, that when the Soviet Union says it wants peace, it is going to fight in such a way so as

to ensure that it is going to be a peace in which the Soviet Union is going to take an active role. Whatever happens and however they negotiate, I at the moment cannot see the situation wherein peace negotiations will be entered into which the Soviet Union is not a party to. Consequently, from this point of view I feel the whole attitude of the Soviet Union is one that we support not only because it has protected the people from the Soviet Union, but because it had advanced the interests of the international working class.

Now the problem that presents itself to me in relation to this war is this. If it is an imperialist war, can we differentiate between the reasons why the British and French bourgeoisie and the German bourgeoisie entered into the war, that is the subjective reasons, that they want the domination of imperialism, and not the objective reasons for which people fight? There is a difference between the policy pursued and why the people themselves fight. This is always so in war. And from this it seems to me that where the power still remains in the hands of the imperialists and where the imperialists are in charge, then there is no difference. But it is the aspirations of the working people that have been exploited in the interests of the imperialist powers, and the possibility of transforming this war into a democratic war while the imperialists still rule seemed to me to be one way in which we raised the revolutionary and democratic movement. We could utilise the movement at the same time for some other questions, more far-reaching questions than the transformation of this war itself.

I don't regard it that we stand for the defeat of British imperialism and consequently stand for the victory of German fascism. I regard it that we stand for the defeat of British imperialism and stand for the defeat of German imperialism. And in so far as we can strengthen our fight on the international field we also have to strengthen the fight of the German Party on the international field. Therefore it is not that we want German imperialism to defend it. We want to be the basis of our own country. We want the working class and the people of the country to be

the rulers of this country, and consequently it does not seem as if the question represents itself in that way, as the victory of one imperialism over the other, but rather that the Comintern believes that perspectives are opening up where the working people of Europe challenge the imperialists for power.

If this is true I think the perspectives that are opened for us are something about which we can feel very happy. But we are not going to fight towards these perspectives unless we understand that they are there and that we have to orientate and work in order to open these perspectives for Britain and the working people of this country. And therefore it seems to me that the thesis of the Communist International as has been presented to us is a correct thesis, and because this is the way that I have worked it out it seems to me to be absolutely correct.

Now about the working out of the line itself. We are vitally interested because of the new perspective and we cannot see today on the agenda of the British working class the revolutionary struggle for power. Therefore we are vitally concerned with the intermediary stages, we are vitally concerned from the point of view of the mobilisation of the people of this country in the struggle for the final overthrow of the British bourgeoisie. It seems to me that in our line it will be impossible for us to try and jump stages. It is of vital importance to us what our relations are going to be with the labour, trade union and progressive movement of this country, and I think it would be wrong to speak in terms of a united front from below.

There are divisions already beginning to show themselves in the labour movement of this country, and opposition to the official attitude of Attlee and Greenwood is still unable in general to express itself. There are, and there must be, reflections of this inside the line of the leadership of the labour movement inside the country, and it is our job to see to it we get the isolation of the main body of the labour movement from those leaders of the labour movement that stand in support of Chamberlain.

I wish, as I expressed to Comrade Campbell when I was

here last, that we had utilised that statement that Greenwood made in Thursday's debate, when he said that the National Government could not continue for another day if it had not the support of the labour movement. I think we should use it because it is a scandal that the leader of the Labour Party in this country can get up and say that in support of a government whose policy has been so disastrous to the lives of the people of this country. When I expressed it at a meeting of trade unionists, I said there is no war on the Western front but there is a war going on, and it is against the working class of this country. The workers are beginning to consider where it is all going to end, if in one month of the war they have lost so many advantages. Our big point inside this country is to fight the fascisation of this country, because they have everything prepared and the movement prepared in the direction of the fascisation of this country.

How I read the thesis is that there is no difference between democracy and fascism. There is a difference, a vital difference, because we have to see that in this country fascism is not going to be imposed. One of the main mistakes of the German Party so far as I can remember it is that they already treated it as if fascism was existing in Germany when it did not exist. We have to mobilise the people of this country for the maintenance and defence of every condition and the wage rates they have gained.

Take the clothing industry, for example. I tell the comrades here that half-a-million people of this country are faced with the worst conditions they have ever been faced with. What is true in relation to the clothing industry is becoming increasingly true in relation to all other industries. The woollen workers of Yorkshire today are working hours and for rates which are a scandal, and I say they could be compared with the conditions in some of the colonial countries.

This is something which we have to discuss, and it is true of cotton. Very significant for us are the moves of the engineering union, where we are getting the revival in Leeds of the shop stewards' movement, and a fight waged against those people particularly from the last war, who

wanted to make it an unofficial shop stewards' movement. The regularisation of factory organisation is something which has to be maintained in every industry in this country, because the factory organisation seems to me to be extremely important.

On our attitude towards the peace terms, of course we have to concretely discuss them when they come through, but I feel no alarm in relation to the peace terms because it is obvious that the Soviet Union, while it won't be able to get a socialist peace, at least will fight for the best possible peace that it can get at the present time. One significant thing to me is that I have heard one woman say, if it can be peace that is particularly desirable. They see their best feelings are being exploited in the interests of imperialism. It is from this point of view that I entirely agree with the thesis that has been put forward.

One or two words now in relation to the presentation of the document itself. Comrade Dutt and the Secretariat who were responsible for the report had got no right to come to this Central Committee and say you either accept it or ... How I understand the Party is that we take the necessary decisions, and I agree that it would be a tragedy for our British Party if we find ourselves in conflict with the Comintern on such an urgent and important situation. Comrades I tell you that if our West Riding District Secretariat took such an attitude inside the West District Party Committee, we would be thrown out and I hope we would. We have given our comrades sufficient idea of their own responsibility, in order to see that such a line could not be taken up. It does not augur well for our Party that such a statement and such an attitude can be taken up, and I will tell you what I have felt. When the bosses have spoken to me like that, either accept these conditions or ... I have always challenged the 'or' and I feel very much like that in this situation.

It is not sufficient to say we have to have absolute clarity. We have to patiently explain, and I tell the comrades that in my opinion it is going to be a fight for a careful explanation. We have to get our DPCs convinced, but have to see before us the position where we have to have many

discussions inside and outside the District Committees to help our comrades to understand. In this situation, it seems to me that when we are discussing the leadership of the Party, the presentation given here does not show that the three comrades have grasped it. But I don't think it gave them any right to come out at the comrades who have got the fate of the Party resting in their hands.

And one last word is this, I want to emphatically support the line put forward by Comrade Cox. That I believe that our Party will suffer one of the greatest losses if we suffer the loss of Comrade Pollitt or Comrade Campbell from the leadership. If we can arrange it for Comrade Pollitt and Comrade Campbell to go over to Moscow for a discussion they should definitely do so and I believe that this would be of value to the Party as a whole. It is for the benefit of the Party as a whole that I put forward and press that that suggestion should be carried out.

## *James Shields*

In my opinion the last statement of the Central Committee should have been on all the questions, and the discussion which now takes place here should have taken place at the last Central Committee meeting.

I think a lot of damage has been done during the past week by the indecisiveness, because the Party has not had a clear line on the situation. Therefore I think that the proposal that was made and which was not accepted, that the Political Bureau should carry on the Central Committee and, if necessary extend it and come forward with the recommendation that the thesis should be adopted – that line should have been adopted. There would have been much more clarity and greater understanding as to what exactly the thesis meant.

I am aware that the comrades who pressed for the delay probably had in mind getting a greater amount of unity and conviction, but I think it was wrong to have such a delay and wrong to have a position where the Political Bureau did not know exactly what it was there for. A conclusion should have been immediately drawn and the situation faced up to and on the thesis that was presented, the steps should have been taken to put the 'thesis into force.

It may be said that that is advocating that it should be accepted from the standpoint of discipline, that the comrades all did not understand it, that we are not in agreement, and so on, and therefore that would be a mechanical thing, that would do harm. Well, I want to say that it is true there might be a certain amount of mechanicalness about that, but in relation to the question of the Soviet Union's action and activities I think that in



every action they take which we uphold and which we should uphold, it is far better for us, whether or not we understand the reasons or the implications in every move, to immediately come out and support that move without first of all weighing up the pros and cons. I think there was no alternative before the Party at the last Central Committee but to accept the line of this thesis.

The discussion has already brought out many points, has clarified the position, but there have already been changes in the line that the Party was operating. That is shown in some of the statements that have appeared in the *Daily Worker*, that we have gone off the old line and gone into the new line, and in the speeches that have been made. But I think we have to avoid in the future, suspending activity in relation to the question of leadership and putting the Party in an impossible position.

Now with regard to the question of the thesis itself and the line of the thesis. I have been thinking very carefully over this, thinking very carefully where can we have made mistakes, or what has been the source of the mistakes that have been made already. I am of the opinion that we made a wrong interpretation of what exactly was happening in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations and the signing of the German-Soviet Pact. I think we had a wrong interpretation on that and that further added to the confused situation, and to a certain extent determined the line that we were taking. I remembered when we considered the question of the German-Soviet Pact, I was one of those – just as I was one who was fully in support of the manifesto of September, who was of the opinion that the signing of this non-aggression pact meant that there would be no war.<sup>1</sup> That it was a big blow for peace, for socialism, but that it was acting as a barrier to war.

I remember at that time, I think the majority had that opinion, and I remember that we readily turned down the different opinion which Comrade Pollitt expressed with regard to the meaning of the signing of this non-aggression pact. I think that that is where we made the first bad mistake, in not understanding the real meaning that was attached to the signing of this Soviet-German pact

of non-aggression. It seems to me now, on looking back, that really was a big turning point, that it was a big change in the whole situation. It was in line with the whole change in the situation that the thesis now visualises, the whole course of development and the line of tactics of the Parties in relation to that.

This raises the question that has been brought up, of Nazi aggression and the line which we had, the line of the fight on two fronts and the line that is now contained in the thesis here. I don't believe, and I think this is where we have to get clarity, I don't believe that the Communist International or ourselves or the Soviet Union stands for Nazi aggression or for Nazi domination. I think on the contrary that the biggest blows given against the Nazi aggression have been given by the Soviet Union. Actually the biggest blows, bigger blows than we have been able to give in this or in any other country.

It is on this question of Nazi aggression and the threat of Nazi domination that clarity has got to be obtained in the Party to get a full understanding of the meaning and line of the thesis. Because where the question has been put, it seems to me that we can again make mistakes if we are not careful, if we give the impression to the working class and to the people in this country that we stand for Hitler's victory on a world scale. I think that would convey an entirely wrong impression, and I don't think that it has any relation to what we actually stand for.

I don't believe that we stand for the victory of Nazi domination and it has not got to be put in that way. We stand for the defeat of British imperialism, but that defeat of British imperialism does not mean that we have suddenly become pro-Hitler. Our comrades in Germany also stand for the defeat of German imperialism, and I believe the Soviet Union, by its actions and the strokes that it has made, has been giving very big blows to fascist aggression, to Hitler domination. I think that is how the thing has to be put, because if we put it incorrectly or unclearly we can give the impression that we are putting a line which means that we are pro-Hitler. But the essential job for us is to defeat the bourgeoisie in this country, the

British imperialists, and to destroy capitalist domination in this country. That is how we have to put it. That is the thing that has got to be put in the forefront.

The line of the thesis stresses that, puts it as our task here in this country, but the line of the thesis is a line in which the Communist International visualises the defeat of not only British imperialism, but the defeat also of German imperialism. It sees the situation as one in which revolutionary development is taking place, in particular of the working class movement internationally to destroy capitalism. The thesis is right therefore in putting the task before us of fighting against our own bourgeoisie in order to defeat our own bourgeoisie, and that is the line of concentration on which we have to devote our attention.

But then there is the question of the position of Germany that has been raised. Many of the things which Comrade Campbell said in his speech were entirely wrong. He had a wrong line in that speech in the way in which he presented the question. But at the same time I don't think we will need more evidence than the quotation from *The Times* to convince people, or me, at any rate, that Germany is on the brink of collapse and revolution. I don't see it as an easy process like that at all in relation to Germany, and I am very sceptical indeed when I see such tremendous publicity being given in the British press to the statements of the German Freedom League and so on, which would tend to give that impression that Germany is on the verge of a complete crack-up and that the revolutionary movement there is going to lead forward.

There is a measure of truth in it because there are weaknesses in the whole structure of German fascism, there are weaknesses in the position, but it is a long step from that to a situation where Germany's on the verge of collapse or on the verge of a revolution taking place there. We have to be careful in our estimate of that, otherwise we can make very big mistakes and mistakes which may do very great harm to the movement. As a matter of fact I see in the strengthening of our line of fight against British imperialism, an assistance to the movement in Germany, and I believe that the biggest assistance that has been given

in that direction has been along the lines of the moves that the Soviet Union has made.

The question is raised of the entry of the Red Army into Poland. The reasons are those Molotov entered into in his speech, primarily to protect the Soviet frontiers and also to liberate the oppressed nationalities of Eastern Poland. I think that is the explanation, but if it was to protect its own frontiers, against whom? Of course against the defeated routed elements of the Polish army, but at the same time also against the possibilities of the Nazis advancing towards the Soviet frontiers. That is how I see the situation. The Soviet Union moved and moved rapidly because there was the danger in that direction. And it seems to me that even yet the ruling class in this country and in France, and also in Germany, have not yet given up their dreams of perhaps seizing part of the Soviet Union even though there is war on.

The reason why the war is on is that the policy of Chamberlain and the non-interventionists has ended in fiasco. That is the reason. Not because they deliberately wanted a war of British imperialism against German imperialism. What they wanted was to use the situation in order to get an imperialist war against the Soviet Union. They are still working in that direction and they will continue to work in that direction. If it is thought that perhaps this danger has now been removed owing to the fact that the war has taken place, we should remember that this does not still rule out the possibilities of very big danger from imperialist attack against the Soviet Union. We have the example of what happened in the case of the Franco-Prussian war, where the war was taking place but where there was the unity and co-operation between these forces when it became a question of destroying the Paris Commune.

Undoubtedly these reactionary elements will strive by every means to turn hatred against the Soviet Union, and if possible prepare the ground for a military attack on the USSR. They have already been curbed to a considerable extent by the action the Soviet Union has taken and the advance of Soviet power. It has established Soviet rule in a big part of Poland, and here we have to be careful about

some of the expressions we now use, about the task of overthrowing fascism only being the task of the people inside the country, because the plain fact is that the Red Army has occupied these people in that part of Poland by action from without, and I don't see any reason why we should quibble about that.

It seems to me that is an excellent thing, and a thing that workers appreciate, and the more they come out in that direction, the more it will be supported by the working class. By the way in which they have taken this action, they have aroused tremendous feeling and given tremendous impetus to the revolutionary movement throughout the Balkans and the Baltic and throughout Europe generally, and also in my opinion in the colonies.

But I don't think it rules out this danger, more especially since the leading circles of the Second International, particularly the dominant leaders of the Labour Party in this country, have been pursuing a course of anti-Soviet incitement. They have been asked to prepare the ground for a drive against the USSR. Greenwood and co. have committed the movement to the restoration of the Poland of Colonel Beck. That was the meaning of the statements on the front page of the *Daily Herald*, and these elements will be used in order to get a violent anti-Soviet feeling. I think we have to take that into account because this danger is ever-present, and the whole imperialist world is striving by every possible means to get a line up against the USSR and to get an attack launched upon the USSR.

I would agree with the point that Comrade Pollitt made about the heroism of the workers who resisted fascist attacks in Warsaw. Certainly they were heroic, these workers. It is quite true that they put up a very fine resistance. But they were used as cannon fodder by the Polish bourgeoisie. I think one of the great pities of the situation is that these workers in Warsaw allowed themselves to be shot and mown down by Nazi artillery as long as they did, because in my opinion it would have been much better for them to have gone over to the Soviet part of Poland instead of allowing themselves to be so discounted.

**Pollitt** – (interjection) How far is Warsaw from Byelorussia?

**Shields** – Of course the reason they were compelled to stay in and resist was because of the reactionary Polish army officers who had control of the situation. I think it was a tragedy that many of the best workers were destroyed who could have been saved.

**Campbell** – (interjection) It is within the bounds of possibility that some of them wanted to resist.

**Shields** – I agree they wanted to resist. I think it is a great pity that many good working class elements and people met with that fate through the complete desertion of Poland by the Polish government, and the way in which they ran away. And here is just exactly where the point comes in that when the Soviet Union makes a move we should support it, whether it is considered to be mechanical or not. This is the line we should take because with every move they take, they know the factors behind it. We did not know that the government of Poland had run out of the country and other people had followed suit.

But the Soviet government knew what was taking place and so was able to act very rapidly because of the knowledge. Very often we are in the position where we lag behind events, because we have not got all the facts and the information at our fingertips. In that respect our international comrades are bound to have an immeasurably greater advantage than us in weighing up the situation and seeing just exactly what should be done. Therefore, because of this danger, and also because of the character of the war, our main line should be the exposure of the imperialist character of the war. The question is how this can be done.

I believe that we have got to have explanation. Careful explanation. We have to present facts. We have also got to,

in relation to this, bring forward demands in connection with the colonies and the empire, such as the Indian Congress demands.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that is a line which can mobilise forces against the Chamberlain government who are pursuing this imperialist line. We have to have this cautious approach to it and whilst we make this approach of exposing the imperialist character, in my opinion it must be strongly linked up with the social and economic demands.

The two go hand-in-hand, it is not a case of separating these but a case of these being interconnected, and using this offensive that is taking place against the working class movement in this country in order to show the type of people that are conducting the war and what their aims actually are. Because as far as I can see the working class in this country are not for sacrifices in the war. There may be a lot of confusion, many of them are under influence of the government line and so on, but they are certainly not for making big sacrifices, even if they have the impression that the war is to end German fascism.

Already there is mass discontent on a wide scale, discontent as a result of the growing unemployment. There has been a sharp increase with people being thrown out of work – the evacuation measures, the character of them and the conditions that the people are expected to put up with and so on, and I think all this has got to be linked up. There is a big feeling of discontent amongst the working class on these questions, and that must be connected up with the exposure of the imperialist character of the war, showing just exactly what is going on. In linking up these demands and conducting exposure, we have to aim for working class unity and develop a real united fight of the working class. You will only get that real unity and the real development of the movement if there is a strong exposure of the line of the Labour Party leadership.

The dominant Labour Party leadership have just gone over to the Chamberlain line, collaboration with the Chamberlain government. Unless these people are exposed I cannot see us developing the working class movement in this country. That does not mean to say that

we should not use any divisions that are in the ranks, that we should not endeavour to draw close to us any person who does not see eye-to-eye with us. The only line we can take on the right-wing leadership is a line of exposure, and before we could get that it means that now more than ever, the Party must get very close to the masses. This will raise practical questions before the Party leadership. Questions in connection with the main centres. Questions in connection with such places first of all as London, where we have 40 per cent of the Party membership, and questions in connection with South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland. It is there that our main forces are concentrated, and it is there that their operation of the line has to be carried through in practice, it means a strengthening of the Party leadership in order to carry through this work.

How can the Party leadership be strengthened? The way to do it now in every organisation of the Party is to bring the Party much more closely towards the masses in the factories and the masses in the trade unions. And I think it is here at the centre and in the districts that we must try and get brought on to the leading bodies comrades who are in the big factories especially. Party members who have an understanding of the line. These are the people we have to rely on in the main to drive the line through, and I think we have to consider that question in the leadership, how we can bring these comrades on with strong trade union contacts and connections with the factories. Above all, in the four main districts of the Party. I would include the Midlands into this as well, and this means really now making a big advance on new cadres. It means developing new cadres, and they will develop more rapidly in the war situation. I think this is one of the questions that requires very great attention now because the Party in my opinion is in very great danger. It is in danger because of a number of mistakes which have been made with regard to the question of our propaganda and our line. It is clear to me, and workers in some areas are discussing it, that some of the mistakes that have taken place in the *Daily Worker* have had a very serious effect.

For instance it is recognised that right up until almost



the last moment, and I think it is we who are responsible, the whole line in the *Daily Worker* was that there would be no war but a second Munich, a sell-out. Then the impression of the meaning of the Soviet-German Pact. Then the harping on the escape clause, and then we get a shock if there is no escape clause in the Pact. These things have been noted, and these mistakes we have to try and avoid in the future. We will only avoid mistakes like that if we are able to bring the Party very close to the masses, get these new cadres brought forward and in this way drive forward the Party line.

I think there will need to be a big concentration on the question of the *Daily Worker* and the carrying through of the line in the *Daily Worker*. In the difficulties now facing the Party it means that everything that can be sacrificed will have to be sacrificed in order to keep the paper going. Here I think the utmost attention will need to be paid to fighting anything in the nature of provocateurs. There is this danger now. I know it may be said that we don't want to give the impression of developing a conspiracy, etc. The plain fact of the matter is that the danger of illegality is now a very serious one for the Party.

In last night's *Standard*, I notice there is already an indication that speeches are being very carefully noted, and that they are ready if they get the slightest opportunity to take measures against individual members of the Communist Party. We know that in a situation where we really fight against and expose them, they will try to use the situation in order to put people into the Party for the purpose of destroying and confusing the Party. Therefore the first safeguard is getting clarity and understanding in the Party. That is the main thing which we need to get but it requires very careful work on the part of the Party leadership, and I think also a change in the methods of work.

It was mentioned in the opening report that in such conditions as we are now faced we don't know when the next meeting of the Central Committee similar to this will be held. I think we have to review the situation if this line has to be carried through. In the districts, for example,

you still have committees with 25 people which meet once a fortnight. Apart from the financial difficulty there has to be a small operative leadership in the districts and a Party leadership with close connections with the factories and the trade unions.

These are some of the practical questions that will have to be considered as well as the question of clarity on the line, how we are going to expose the imperialist character of the war.

I don't want to go over ground that other comrades have referred to, but on this question of peace proposals and how I interpreted the line in the thesis, it seems to me that first of all what is necessary is to read it in light of the discussion that has taken place here, that duplicated document, to make certain alterations in it. It should be re-edited. Secondly in light of our line for being against British imperialism, for the defeat of British imperialism, this is going to raise questions. It may be sooner or later, certainly not at this juncture, in relation to the question of peace proposals and the alternative form of government, because the line of the thesis is a revolutionary line, the development towards revolution, and that means considering all suitable opportunities and in the preparatory stages of propaganda on workers' councils.

This means considering, in relation to the war situation, how we are going to approach the question of fraternisation at the front. Because once fraternisation takes place amongst the soldiers, this means the finish of the lot of them, both Hitler and the people in this country. We now, I think, have quite a considerable bit of support in the various services and forces, and it is not just sufficient to leave it out of account. I think we have to give careful leads and instructions to these comrades. It has to be worked out in relation to the practical problems that will face the comrades in the districts, the comrades on the spot, gathered together. We must have an eye on the future. If the line of the thesis is, as I believe it is, of shattering capitalism, of using the situation in order to go forward with the extension and advance of revolution, we have to give greater attention to all the implications

involved in the thesis.

I don't believe they have all been taken into account yet. I believe they have to be very carefully considered, and somewhat along these lines.

### *Notes*

1. This was the manifesto issued by the CPGB Central Committee which called for the struggle on two fronts, against Hitler abroad and against Chamberlain at home. This statement is reproduced in full in eds. Attfield and Williams, 1939 *The Communist Party and the War*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979.
2. On 14 September 1939 the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress issued a statement condemning British policy in India. Britain had declared India a belligerent country, and introduced emergency powers without Indian consent. Stressing the contradiction between British claims to fight for democracy and its imperialist policies in India and elsewhere, the Indian National Congress demanded a commitment to Indian independence. 'If Britain fights for democracy, then she must necessarily end imperialism and establish full democracy in India. Self-determination, a Constituent Assembly and the guidance of future policy by the people of India must be accepted.'

## *William Cowe*

I want to explain my position in relation to the discussion. First I want to state that, so far as I have been concerned, always the Communist International has been an unrivalled political authority and guide in my estimation, and I have always accepted it as such even in the days when I was just groping in the dark. The Communist International was the guiding light, and despite the fact that on many occasions I blindly followed the International, today I am in the same position. I consider it the same unrivalled political authority and guide for the Communist Parties of the world and Communist Party members.

However, when Comrade Springhall arrived back here at the last Central Committee meeting and made his short statement on the thesis, I think it is the first time in my life that I questioned the authority of the International. I considered at that particular time that the position was quite clear to us, so far as the war is concerned, and I was thoroughly satisfied with the attitude which had been laid down by the Party leadership with regard to the character of the war and the tasks of the Party. Since the last Central Committee meeting I also had that impression, up until yesterday morning, when after our first session I was still of the opinion that the Party attitude to the war was quite correct although I had a certain number of questions to put forward. Between the Central Committee meetings we had come in contact with members of the Party, and many workers, and it was true that within the last 2/3 days the character of the war is quite openly being discussed in the Party.

Despite the fact that none of us, at least Kerrigan and

myself as Central Committee members, have at any time engaged in such conversations, and we carried out the instruction of the Central Committee to the last letter, the comrades themselves, reading the *Daily Worker*, seeing the events which have taken place, have been discussing the question of the character of the war. The two cardinal features that caused them to do such a thing, and which led me to review the situation and try to think it out much harder than I was doing, were the fact that the Soviet Union had come to an agreement with Germany and had put forward a call for peace on the western front now that no war was taking place on the Eastern front; and another big factor, a factor in the minds of all communists, was the fact that the democratic elements in the war were being eliminated. We can take into consideration the situation in this country, but particularly the situation in France, where the Communist Party was banned and all its property confiscated.

Now these things led me to question the attitude of the Party to the war and I think that the reluctance which I have felt in arriving now at agreement with the thesis has got two reasons. First that I have been schooled in the points on the 7th World Congress, and although we got schooled on the basic works of Lenin and Marx, nevertheless we had the highly-coloured anti-fascist teachings. Quite clearly we had got focused in our mind's eye what fascism actually meant to the working class movement, what a menace it was and what dangers threatened the entire human race. Now that we have got a situation in the midst of a war, where we have got to sharply turn in characterising the war, that great reluctance was due to that experience.

The other reason is that party policy in Great Britain – as in other countries, but we are speaking for Great Britain just now – has been based as sharply and distinctly on the anti-fascist front. Our whole Party policy up until now has been for such a thing even in the conditions of war that it predicted.

Therefore I have come to the conclusion that we have got to agree to the thesis, and in agreeing to the thesis I am

not just lightly coming to that agreement, because I know what it means. It means first, so far as I am concerned (and I know able members of the Central Committee can adapt themselves much more quickly to such a change), reversing the notions, and getting arguments and perspectives now that we did not have before, when this question of the war was defined in common agreements with the entire leadership of the Party in Great Britain. The thesis is correct when you take into consideration the discussions which have taken place here, when you try to really come to the reasons why the Party has made so many mistakes recently.

The making of mistakes has caused considerable perturbation amongst the Party members. When you take into consideration the fact that we start from turning definitely with regard to conscription, and then not being aware of what the breakdown in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations actually meant in a new situation, I am in agreement with the thesis in explaining why the Party was not able to take the proper message to the people of Great Britain with regard to the German-Soviet Pact. Or, for instance, we expected an escape clause, and surprise was caused among the leading comrades, particularly when Soviet intervention took place in Poland, and now that the call has been made by the Soviet and German governments for a peace on the western front.

These are the mistakes that we have definitely made as a Party leadership. It has been very difficult to explain these mistakes in the light of the line of the Party up until now. I cannot say that I have done it satisfactorily nor is it the case that in Scotland we got comrades to agree that these mistakes were just ordinary mistakes that did not challenge or raise the question of party leadership.

The thesis, when you begin to think about it and think hard, begins to give an explanation of why these mistakes were made, and the Party line has got to be reviewed in these circumstances. But it still remains a fact that this entire Central Committee, was responsible for these mistakes without a single exception. These mistakes were caused because every one of the members of the Central

Committee were entirely convinced, like myself, about the correctness of the Party line up until now. Therefore if we are going to agree to the thesis today, that does not mean to say that we can now just very quickly and smoothly, without any trouble at all, go over to new arguments and say that we are not surprised about the existing situation.

I don't think there is a member of the Central Committee, from Comrade Dutt, who opened this discussion, to the most unenlightened member, who can now come forward and say that he can state a 100 per cent case for this thesis in the sense of developing all the arguments, being able to produce all the solutions to the problems that naturally do arise. What I am concerned about today, apart from explaining how I arrived at agreement on the thesis, is the fact that I was very much concerned not about the sharp political nature of the discussion yesterday and today, because I know that when the Party is considering a mistake, and when a change of line has to take place it is absolutely necessary to be sharp and very frank. But I think that the language that was used yesterday was not of the best, because, as I have tried to explain, we all have difficulties, we have all been committed. We have to recognise that not one of us, if we are going to agree to the thesis, not one of us saw the new situation opening up with the breakdown of the Anglo Soviet negotiations.

Not one of us recognised all the subsequent surprises and alarms caused by the war situation. Therefore none of us have any right to turn fire on comrades who are still grappling with the problems, because every one of us has problems just now, and we have to use the most exhaustive means of discussion in order to get every comrade clear with regard to it. Therefore I say words being used about 'deserters', about 'sacrificing political lives' and various other things should never have been used at this Central Committee. It was not good for younger members of the Central Committee in the first case that an implied threat was made by Comrade Dutt in the introduction of this discussion yesterday. So far as I am concerned, if anybody threatens me, naturally a guy gets his blood up and begins

to get pugnacious, but in political discussion it is not helpful to arrive at a proper and correct solution to the problem if in introducing such a serious and grave change in our Party line we get it mixed up with certain threats that are thrown about.

Then if you take the other point, the words that have been used about deserters, I don't agree with Gallacher about not having association with the other people, but that does not mean to say that we have to become enemies of one another. We are still comrades in the Party. We are still leading comrades and members of the Communist Party, and therefore the sudden change which has taken place has to be approached from the point of view that there are problems not only with Comrade Pollitt, if he is going to be taken as the comrade who is still retaining the old line on this occasion, but also problems with every one of us no matter to what degree we are accepting the line. We have to approach it immediately as a Central Committee that is recognising a mistake or a series of mistakes, a sharp turn in the Party policy, and we have to give leadership and comradely relations in discussion in order to get this leadership cemented and to see our whole view, the unity of the Party from now on.



## *James Roche*

I believe it is necessary that we should all express our opinion of the thesis and I wish to add mine. The mechanical acceptance of the thesis has led to the issue of the statement from the provisional Secretariat. Mechanically accepting the thesis as it came from the Communist International would be bad for us and I am all in favour of thrashing the matter clearly out along the lines of getting conviction on the question.

In regard to the point put forward by Comrade Jimmy Shields, I fully agree with him when he says that the Political Bureau made a mistake in not seeing that last week's Central Committee was adjourned for a day. I believe that week has cost us dearly, but it also brings something else to my mind – that this Central Committee has been often too apt to accept the lead from the Political Bureau without raising its own views. I myself when I went away felt rather perturbed that a week was going to pass by, and I had the idea that in all probability we had postponed the meeting till the Wednesday because Comrade Pollitt was going to Moscow to further discuss the question.

I believe we have been attempting to adapt our old slogans to a new situation and in doing this we have found that we have had to use such expressions such as the British people are on the spot. The imperialists of Great Britain are also on the spot because of the actions of the Soviet Union. The old slogans in the new situation lead to the situation where we were greeted with hostility inside the factory. I felt personally in the factory very uncomfortable and could not really argue with the workers along the line that we previously had. We did not

recognise that Germany had now no longer become the spearhead of intervention against the Soviet Union.

If this was the case, if Germany was then no longer the spearhead of intervention, then quite obviously the monopoly of direct intervention against the Soviet Union fell upon the shoulders of British and French imperialism. The Soviet Union is still pursuing a policy of peace, but taking steps to see that the policy of peace will be an equitable peace, a peace of collective security, collective security coupled with the line we are pushing forward now. I think if we found ourselves here in opposition to the line pursued by the Soviet Union, and we did that on the basis of the old policy, if the line that we have as a Party of Great Britain does not harmonise with the policy of the Soviet Union, then inevitably we will find ourselves in the camps of the anti-soviets, because each succeeding event, each succeeding action of the Soviet Union will find us floundering still more in an attempt to explain the new situation with the old line and old policy.

When Comrade Whittaker outlined the point put forward by Comrade Lenin in his pamphlet *Against the Stream*,<sup>1</sup> in which he pointed out that the fact that the October Revolution took place in peculiar circumstances did not necessarily mean that the new socialist state could not liberate other peoples, this was sufficiently expressed by Comrade Shields when he said that the Red Army did liberate Poland. We have to realise here is a new situation. And when people tell us that we never thought the Red Army would ever march into another country, we can see what took place.

One final point I wish to emphasise strongly. I feel very much against this recriminatory attitude adopted by the members of the leading body inside the Central Committee themselves. This lack of self-criticism. It is a fact that all of us are responsible for the old policy, and it is also true that the members of the Political Bureau have the greater responsibility than the others. If they refuse to criticise themselves effectively enough, how can we really be convinced that they have accepted the line? I am referring to the members of the provisional Secretariat.

How can they accept the line out of conviction? Such statements put forward by the Secretariat have convinced me of this.

This was also expressed by Comrade Dutt when he adopted his now famous 'or else', because I also feel like Comrade Cowe. My Irish blood got up and I was inclined to feel pugnacious about it. But I believe that more important than anything is that we retain the unity of the Party. I believe it is absolutely essential that we should strive and use every possible means in order to get the unity of the Party. As for a change in the secretaryship of the Party, if we could possibly avoid it we should. A change would bring quite a deal of confusion and dismay inside the rank-and-file Party members up and down the country and I believe it is the duty of our Central Committee to take some serious decisions on this question before it leaves.

### Notes

1. *Against the Stream* was a collection of articles written by Lenin and G.E. Zinoviev in Switzerland during the First World War. An introduction written by Zinoviev in March 1918 for the first Russian edition did indeed envisage the possibility of the Russian army being used to wage revolutionary wars.

Jim Roche has cited *Against the Stream* out of context here, as the book referred to by Whittaker was Stalin's *Leninism*.

## *Rajani Palme Dutt*

I want to say only one or two things, not on the general issues which have been fully discussed, but to help comrades with regard to the vote, to endeavour to remove some difficulties that may exist in the minds of comrades from the character of the report which, with full responsibility, we believed it necessary to make, and from questions of personalities that may have come into the discussion.

The question you have to decide is the question of the line and only of the line. Not the question of persons. We are not putting forward some persons against other persons. We all share equal responsibility for the original position of the manifesto, and most of all those of us, including Comrade Rust and myself, who are closest to the centre of the Party. What is arising now is that we have reached a position where there is complete clearness of the international line. If we were to admit any excuse for a great historical error that we have all made, the best attempt that we could make would be that we made it in common with other of the western leaderships. But now, when the international line is cleared, every Party is adjusting itself.

The American Party and its leadership has adjusted itself. The Belgian Party adjusted itself. We have to go through the same thing here, and the difficulty that we have come up against here is that a group of important leading comrades have taken a position of full opposition to the line decided by the International. That is our special problem. And when that happens it is necessary to fight and to make no apologies for it, without kid gloves, without regard to friendship. The issue of the interna-

tional line is involved in the Party, and we fight for that and we fight for every Party member to fight equally without regard to persons. We want unity but we want that on the basis of the line.

Comrades who were alarmed by the sharpness with which this issue was presented should realise the character of the situation with which we were faced: of the four members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International who are on this Central Committee, three members have openly spoken before the Central Committee against the line and decision of the Executive Committee. Not against some detail where there might be a difference of opinion, not against some passing instruction that we can consider, that is not really considered judgment, no, against a basic world line for all Parties. That is a tremendously serious position. It is a thing which goes beyond the competence of our Party. That is a matter of concern for the International.

But we as a Party have to face this problem in relation to our line and to face it in the best way that we can. And the first thing that is absolutely necessary in that case is that we must be determined, whatever difficulties it involves with regard to personal ties, forces or whatever else, that we shall find the means to carry out that line. If we have put things very sharply to these older comrades who have taken this position, can't you see that we are fighting to save their lives? We have tried every way, it is not a question as Comrade Cowe puts it as if they are grappling with the position, coming half-way and so on.

We understand all the difficulties involved in the public commitments that they hold in relation to the position and would help in every way possible with regard to that. That can be faced, that can be met. Take the position of Comrade Browder, leading a Party of 100,000 who took a direct position corresponding to ours on 3 September in a full statement from the Central Committee of the Party. When it was clear that a different character of the line would be needed, he gives it and leads the opposite line.

Here we are faced with a different position. With an absolute definite determined opposition to the line,

presenting every possible argument against it, and even, in the case of such speeches as those of Comrade Gallacher and Comrade Campbell of a truculent attitude as if somehow they have been wronged. That is them insisting on the sanctity of their private opinions. Comrades, a Communist has no private opinions. That is, he has no sanctum of private opinions that he is going to hold apart from the collective thinking and the collective decisions of our movement.

Therefore I think we can welcome the fact, and I have noted very carefully from the discussion, that every single expression from every comrade in the country, from every comrade in contact with the work of the movement, has come out in support of the line. You understand why in such a situation we have had to present it sharply. We are not wanting to bring in personal issues. When I speak of deserters I was wanting to present to these comrades what it would mean for them to go out of the leadership in such a situation, which was the course that they are taking, that they are asking for. It is not a question of whether we want to attack, or to accuse, but for them simply to think what it would look like in the eyes of the workers if after a whole prolonged relatively easy period, a great legal Party, great public meetings, in which they have played a prominent part, perhaps just a few weeks before the blow has fallen on the Party these prominent comrades disappear from the leadership. That is the seriousness. It is not 'we understand', 'we accuse', etc; we understand what they mean as fighters with all they have done building the Party and everything else, we are putting to them to face up to their responsibilities before the working class.

Therefore clear out these questions of personalities. When we brought up these issues that arose over the peace proposals and our reaction to it, we brought it up in order to show the disastrous condition resulting from having a pull of different lines and the necessity of having a complete unity and conviction of the line. This Secretariat, this body of three, we don't put ourselves in that position, we were put there with responsibility for the protection of

the line during this temporary week, so that even though the old line was still the formal basis of the Party, since we would be advancing to the new line, the situation should not be sabotaged.

Comrade Pollitt said that Comrade Dutt must be put on the Secretariat as the guarantee to the International that there should be no sabotage of the line. I argued against it, and said I would have the same difficulty in operating it, when the old line still formally holds and I believed in the new, but that I would be ready to take up what the Party thought fit and to help in the best way. We were put as a Secretariat there for the protection of the line. We were brought up against an issue, this complete sharpness of the issue, presented by the peace proposals. Other comrades of the Central Committee felt it. We felt this made a difference to the situation. It is now necessary, although the Central Committee has not met, to come out with a definite line. We were overruled on this.

That is, we were not able to carry out the responsibilities that had been entrusted to us for protecting the line. It is not a question of phrases but of coming out with a line when there was no line. That was absolutely vital. With coming out with no line, the type of statement of Saturday, I felt it was a disaster for the Party, the greatest humiliation I ever felt for the Party. We had to report this position, not in the sense of saying that there is one group and another group, but in the sense of reporting to the party this is a situation which cannot continue. There must be clearness of the line, there must be unity of the leadership, a difficulty exists.

Now in regard to the thesis, you are voting on the thesis, the resolution and only on the thesis. You are not voting on the report that was presented to you. The report that was presented is simply the attempt of these comrades placed on the Secretariat to work out as well as we could could a clear statement of what are the issues, what are the reasons for the policy in the thesis, what is the outlook and changes in the situation, how we propose to apply the tactics and so on. Of course all that, everything that goes beyond what is in the thesis, is a matter for discussion, a

matter for thrashing out and reaching our decisions. There is nothing that we say that is the bible about it at all. It is particularly correct that we should not tie up the thesis with particular estimates or particular factors that are still open to further working out. For example the question of the relative military strength or weakness of Germany, the question of the prospects or distance of revolution in Germany. The thesis applies in either case apart from our estimates of these things.

The sharp presentation which was made was not a question before us. I will have to look at the stenogram myself to find out what is this 'or else' to which comrades have referred because I don't understand it. I am not aware of that, I am aware of having deliberately placed the sharpest issue that will have to be faced up to by every comrade, that we had taken an absolutely definite stand, because we did not and do not want a situation of a vote if accompanied by all kinds of reservations, all kinds of doubts that lead to complete confusion in carrying out the line. That is our only reason. It is childish to suggest, as Comrade Burns suggests, that for some malicious reason we want as few as possible to vote for it. We want every one to vote but we want them to vote on the basis of a whole-hearted conviction of this line and I believe that we have in the statements made a real concrete advance and help towards this position.

Even so we have had one or two examples still of this sort of acceptance with reservations, that if it was general would leave the Party in a state of complete confusion and helplessness of leadership. We have had in the case of Comrades Burns and Gollan that acceptance with reservations that is dangerous. So to a certain extent with Comrade Bramley. They have these difficulties, alright, we appreciate and will endeavour to help, but it is extremely dangerous for the Party if that was the general position of the leadership. I think there is a difference in regard to Comrade Kerrigan. Taking as difficult the question that he raised, I just say one word on that. He raised the question of military defeatism, that he could understand that, but does that mean standing for the



military victory of Hitler and is not that a disaster and so on.

Now the understanding of this is that what we are pursuing is an international line. That international line is carried out in a struggle against all the imperialists by all sections of the working class movement, and the only position – this is the simple Leninist position – is that you can only fight your own imperialists because if you start fighting the enemy imperialist during the war, in practice you are supporting your own imperialist. That is the difficulty. It is not that we are in favour of Hitler winning anything whatever. But if for that reason we start supporting the imperialist war of Chamberlain, then in practice we are supporting imperialism. That is what we failed to understand correctly, and what produced all these harmful results for the Party.

With regard to Poland, that Austria was also semi-fascist and so on. There was this point, that the Polish government refused the peace front. That became the great question of the wrecking of the peace front. Of course they were used by Chamberlain. They did it in collaboration with Chamberlain who was only pretending, as they were. We know that Chamberlain and Beck were working together. In fact the Polish government prevented and wrecked the peace front, and by doing that they brought international disaster on their people, but they did bring forth the war, that is the consequence of the rejection of the peace front. That is obviously an entirely different position from Spain, Czechoslovakia, Austria, or any of these countries overrun by fascism.

Therefore the fact of the suffering of the Polish people, there you have the same as the suffering of the Belgian people overrun by Germany. You cannot mix the entirely natural feelings of the Polish peasants with the actual politics of the war, of the imperialist war, the responsibility of the government, the collaboration that this means, and the hard consequences that we have to take in our fight. There are moments when it is necessary to be hard because you see the whole world situation and where the forces go. We know quite well that if they developed the just war against fascism, the blows would have been falling

on innocent German people and so on, and we would not hesitate about that at all. We are told by some comrades that they are concerned over the fate of the Polish peasants and so on, and that if it is necessary in order to defeat fascism we must be ready to face a holocaust and so on. They understand that it is necessary to be hard for a political purpose, and here also we have to understand the political significance of the Polish question in this imperialist war and be capable of basing our attitude upon that.

With regard to the question of the draft manifesto. I think the points throughout in the discussion are going to be helpful in the revision of this manifesto.

On the peace question, the position that we are taking is a quite simple one. We are not outlining the terms of an ideal peace. We are not dealing here with the terms of the peace. We are demanding that peace negotiations be begun including the Soviet Union. We have not put in the inclusion of the United States, I think correctly, because at this moment, with the present relation of forces, the United States is an extra force on the side of Britain and France. That follows on this general change of relationships with regard to the world role of fascist and democratic states. Therefore we should make our basis on the three warring states and the Soviet Union.

Further, when we speak of the role of the popular forces, the whole point is that we are not saying 'leave the Soviet Union to do everything'. We must do our job here in fighting against the Chamberlains and Daladiers. If you reach that position in which a powerful popular mass movement is raising the demand for peace and is forcing peace upon the governments, at the same time as the Soviet Union is going there, you are helping to create a situation in Europe in which, even though fascism remains in Germany, there is an enormous advance in the whole force of the position for going forward into the most favourable way also to the fundamental overthrow of fascism in Germany. Therefore our immediate slogan is the perfectly simple one of peace. As we remember the Basle manifesto<sup>1</sup> in the event of war, the two tasks to work

for are the speedy termination of the war and to use the economic and political crisis caused by the war for the awakening of the consciousness of the struggle of the masses towards our fundamental revolutionary aims. Then the inclusion of socialism in the aims.

We can look back on the manifesto, in which we have brought in among our slogans, socialism, alongside concrete mass slogans on immediate objectives, the conception of socialism as the general conception of the road on which we travel. But what I believe the comrades have in mind in raising this is the question of the government, and that we purposely threw open to the discussion of the Central Committee. That will finally have to be decided by the new Political Bureau. All this estimation about revolutionary workers' government and so on is right out of the question.

We have two possibilities. You are at the stage of struggle in which the immediate practical objective is the maximum pressure in order to force through certain policies either through this government or through any alternative government that can carry it through. The important thing is these objectives and to force them through, and not to define, when you have not the position of the movement, the exact form of alternative government you may reach in the process of this, because at present it is obvious that the old conception based on the Liberal-Labour parties would only be a continuance of the war type of government.

It may very well be that we may reach a formulation in which we define the type of government we would work for to replace Chamberlain by the aims that it should accomplish. The type of lines as indicated by Comrade Cox. That is, for the aims of peace and for the aims of our social programme and demands. That we may reach, we shall have to hold the discussion immediately in the Political Bureau about the decision to reach such a formulation. It is one in which there are new conditions which would have to be faced with extreme care, and that is why we have deliberately thrown it open for the opinions of the Central Committee in relation to the line.

I think we can welcome very much the speeches that were made by a number of comrades with broadest experiences from all over the country that confirm what is going on in the country, the feeling of the people, among the workers in the factories, that confirm the line, the correctness of this line. That is what is needed in order to overcome this stifling of the struggle that has been taking place through a wrong line and to put the Party on to the task that it must fulfil in war conditions, not of stifling, but of stimulating, helping forward and leading every stage of the struggle in this position of the most extreme attack that is taking place, and that will enormously increase, upon the workers from the government, using the war situation for its purpose. Therefore, we want now to take the vote that is quite simply voting for or against the war. For or against Churchill, for or against the international line. We vote on the thesis, don't let that vote be mixed up in all the other multitude of considerations that may have been brought in.

*Notes*

1. At its 1912 Basle congress, the Socialist International adopted a resolution which recorded 'with satisfaction the complete unanimity of the socialist parties and of the trade unions of all countries in declaring war against war'. The resolution threatened strikes and uprisings in the event of imperialist war. The socialist parties' failure to adhere to these principles at the outbreak of the First World War caused the collapse of the International.

## *The Vote*

**Emile Burns** – Just on the question. What is it actually we are voting on? We are voting on the resolution. I have certain amendments to propose which I think should be taken first before the vote. First on the reference to Poland. The resolution should read ‘international working class can under no conditions support the war for the restoration of fascist Poland which refused Soviet aid and oppressed other nationalities’. I said quite clearly that I was not clear on the point, about Poland’s fight.

**Dutt** – We should oppose the amendment because the reason for it is that it believes the conception of the just war, the Polish war. Although this formulation refers in fact to a stage that is passed, we want to have that formulation in the resolution because it makes clear a cardinal point, the estimation of the Polish war.

**For the thesis:** Jessop, Rust, Cornforth, Kerrigan, Burns, Gollan, Bramley, Springhall, Cox, Cowe, Hart, Crane, Shields, Whittaker, Roche, Dutt.

**Non-Members of Central Committee:** Williams, Stewart, Allison, Shields, Lee.

**Against the thesis:** Pollitt, Campbell, Gallacher.

**Burns** – On the Polish one, that is simply expressing my own doubt on the question. On the other amendment that I have got, it seems to me of extreme importance in view of the character of the discussion that we have had and the amount of time that has been lost on this discussion about democracy and fascism. What I propose to do is to put in words there which I am sure will be in the longer thesis,

but which really help to prevent these internal questions being raised. I am convinced that the thesis really refers to the international position, therefore after the 'division of States into democratic and fascist states that has now lost its former sense' I suggest instead, 'in relation to the present international situation, both groups are engaged in war for their imperialist aims'.

**Rust** – The words proposed by Comrade Burns say 'in so far as they both engaged in war for their imperialist aims'. That is already giving a certain interpretation of the events of today and the actual political situation that we are facing, in which we are raising as the main thing the fight against the determination of Britain and France to continue the war in face of the joint Soviet-German proposal for peace. Therefore to add that would be liable to give a misinterpretation as to our policy in the immediate situation. What we can do, and I don't think we should add to the thesis because it is likely to lead to unclarity, is take a decision of the Central Committee to emphasise the necessity of the struggle of the Party against fascist tendencies in Great Britain and the fight for our democratic rights in the light of the attack on the French Party and the numerous steps against democracy in this country. In that way we get the clarity that we want.

**Burns** – I don't believe that we do. I think that it really is an important point in order to save unclarity throughout the Party.

**Dutt** – You bring in an explanation that is extremely doubtful. I would say it is because of their alignment in the international situation instead of because of their imperialist aims. We should leave this formulation as it stands. Don't imagine that we are taking any decision that we are going to improve on by putting our own ideas in. As we see quite clearly, this does not apply to the internal regimes, that can be now understood for speakers when they are explaining it to the Party and so on, it is clear to the Central Committee, but don't let us talk about it in the resolution.

**Roche** – I understand from Burns' contribution that he wants it to be quite clear that the differentiation is between them on the international scale.

**Burns** – Can we show it in relation to the present international situation?

**Roche** – It is not so much an amendment as an addition. It is in the interpretation. Are the comrades agreed that this interpretation of the differentiation put forward by the Communist International is correct, to interpret it in the line as put by Burns?

**Rust** – There is no need to add to the thesis. If there is unclarity, then adding 'in relation to the international situation' won't clear it up.

**Burns** – Are we ourselves clear or are we not?

**Rust** – I think from the discussion that we have had that we are clear, that we are clear on the point that we are referring to the international relations and not to the internal situation, the necessity for the fight against fascist tendencies must be strongly emphasised that in fact it was one of the points that Comrade Springhall mentioned as a result of his discussions with Dimitrov.

**Roche** – I think that is what we really want. If all the members of the Central Committee interpret this differentiation in this manner, I don't think it is necessary to add anything to the thesis in that respect.

**Burns** – I don't mind in the least. It is simply a question of trying to make the presentation of it in the districts and branches clearer.

**Pollitt** – What is the procedure after the meeting?

**Dutt** – What we shall have to do now as a Central Committee is determine the question of the Political

Bureau in relation to this line. We are faced with this situation that we have a Political Bureau on which some comrades are against the basic line adopted by the Central Committee. It means again it will have to take the best decision. The Secretariat will have to prepare its proposals and its recommendations in this interval. When we meet again this can then be considered by the Central Committee.

**Allison** – Would it not be wise to try some other procedure? A vote has now been taken, and maybe I am putting my foot into it. I don't mind that, if we can get progress. I would be in favour of the Central Committee adjourning for a longer period and I would be in favour of conversations with the Political Bureau. The Political Bureau should come forward to the resumed Central Committee, with a whole series of proposals first of all with regard to the leadership, with regard to the national conference, which in my opinion we must make some decision on here today, whether we are going to hold it or not, and propositions also with regard to the application of this line. I would like to throw out the suggestion that we get an adjournment of two hours in order to try and get the Political Bureau to come forward here with propositions that can keep intact this form of unity in relation to carrying out the line.

**Gallacher** – It is clear that the Executive Committee will have to take the necessary action in view of the situation that has developed. It is necessary that I should make my position clear to the Central Committee members and to the Party. Because unfortunately I cannot be here in the afternoon. I have to be in the House where Chamberlain is making his statement. I happen to be one who has had special responsibility in endeavouring to put the line of the Party and the line of the Communist International. I understand the line of the Communist International. I have certain questions. I am still of the opinion that we were entitled, in view of the situation that developed, to discussion with the Communist International.



It is necessary to draw attention to certain omissions which were made yesterday by Comrade Dutt. For instance, the man who was insisting on getting in our document 'Chamberlain must stand by his pledge to Poland', which was the most foul thing in the document, was Comrade Rust. When Comrade Dutt gave a list of things which had been said he did not tell you that it was Comrade Rust who made the complaint that our Party was simply becoming the 'propaganda department of the Soviet foreign office'. The point is this, I don't believe that there is any conviction behind this at all so far as these comrades are concerned. I want to say that as a consequence of this, I am seething through and through with disgust. I understand the line of the Party. If I have to speak in the House of Commons, you can rely upon it that whatever I say will be on the line of the Party. But the Party must now take a decision not only about the Political Bureau, the Party must take a decision that neither of these comrades are capable or responsible for putting the line to the Party. They have to face the responsibility of withdrawing my role as a Member of Parliament.<sup>1</sup>

**Pollitt** – You are discussing something which will come up this afternoon.

**Gallacher** – I want the comrades to know that when the Party has considered the matter and made the decision, that I am ready to fall in with the wishes of the Party, and if they decide I shall withdraw, I withdraw. But again let me say that I have never had such a feeling of real deep-seated disgust and if you make a Political Bureau, comrades, I ask you to put a comrade such as Peter Kerrigan on it who can, while I am in parliament, keep a contact with me. For I cannot, under any circumstances, associate myself with these three people.

**Pollitt** – Comrades, we are faced with two questions. The first question is that we must entrust, apart from any personal considerations, to Rust, Dutt and Springhall, who have introduced the thesis into this Central Committee,

the immediate responsibility for issuing the line of the Party. Chamberlain does not speak until 3.45. But you have already got in this document, without coming out with the whole pack of tricks as you are trying to do here, a line that can be a reply to Chamberlain's speech, subsequently amended by 'phone to the *Daily Worker* in the actual light of what he is going to say. I think we are clear on one thing. Chamberlain is not going to declare war on Russia.

The second thing is that we cannot in these circumstances meet at 2.15. But the Central Committee has a right to know what is going in its name, and therefore I propose that from three o'clock or so, we are all on hand, the comrades can get the statement drafted and let them come back to the Central Committee with their proposals in regard to the new Political Bureau. Then it will be the responsibility of the Central Committee to take its decisions. If we start the argument now, you will have the *Daily Worker* tomorrow with nothing at all.

If I may, I would like to suggest to the Secretariat that they take their document as it stands now. With introductory remarks that you can make in the light of what Chamberlain says, to let paragraphs one, two, three go as they stand, to take out of paragraph four the sentence 'the advance of the working class and of the people's' revolution is forcing itself to the forefront ... to ... become more and more open'. That can come out because you have it expressed in a previous paragraph. Let paragraph five stand as it is, then delete all the rest of that page and on page two, until you come to paragraph four which starts 'the Communist Party has stood and always will stand ...', then the next, then delete the reference to Churchill, cut out the sentence 'the struggle of the British people against the Chamberlains and Churchills', cut off the next paragraph, and then end the manifesto, 'we are against the continuation of the war for imperialist aims, we demand that negotiations be immediately opened with the Soviet Union for the establishment of peace in Europe.'

You can introduce whatever you like, no-one tomorrow

will be interested in that. They want to hear what is the attitude of the Party towards what is the world political issue at the present time, the question of peace. And I believe that these three comrades can work on that document, they would bring out the basis on what we have to say in relation to Chamberlain's speech to the House of Commons. I feel that is the first essential to do so that you can arrange for it to be in the *Daily Worker*.

When you have it in regard to the proposal of the Political Bureau there is likely to be some considerable discussion and there won't be a question of shortening it.

*Agreed*

*Central Committee adjourned*

*Notes*

1. There is a gap in the original microfilm at this point. Judging from what follows, it seems fair to assume that what Gallacher said was 'withdrawing my role as a Member of Parliament.'

## *Closed Session*

Comrade Pollitt made the following declaration on behalf of Comrade Gallacher – 'I want the Central Committee to agree to the vote that Comrade Gallacher registered against the thesis to go on record of being in favour. Gallacher has been nearer the line of the International than many of us. If you follow his speeches in Parliament you will see he has fought for the peace move of the Soviet Union. All of us know Comrade Gallacher's temperament. No one has had a more difficult job than he has. His speech at the Central Committee was on the line of the thesis but he got rattled because of personal feelings. Actually he is for the thesis and therefore wants his vote recorded in favour of it.'

The election of a new Political Bureau took place. It was unanimously decided by the Central Committee that the new Political Bureau should consist of supporters of the line adopted in the resolution.

Comrade Dutt on behalf of the provisional Secretariat moved the following list of names for the Political Bureau: Gallacher; Springhall; Rust; Cox; Whittaker; Crane; Kerrigan; Bramley; Dutt. To this list it was agreed after discussion to add the name of Comrade Gollan.

Comrade Pollitt moved the deletion of Comrades Springhall and Rust from the list and the inclusion of Comrades Burns and Gollan. After discussion the list proposed by Comrade Dutt was adopted by nineteen votes, to two votes for the list proposed by Comrade Pollitt.

## *Biographical Notes*

### *Participants*

**George Allison** (1895–1951). Fife miner, founder member CPGB (joined from SLP). Member of CPGB Central Committee 1929–1932, 1935–1938 and 1943–1951. Member of Political Committee, CPGB 1945–1951. Secretary of South Yorkshire District, CPGB 1938–1940. Went to India 1925 as trade union organiser. Jailed for 18 months. Back in Britain became secretary of National Minority Movement 1929–1931. Jailed again for three years under Incitement to Mutiny Act.

**Edward (Ted) Bramley** (1905–1989). Engineer, joined CPGB around 1927. Member of Central Committee 1932–1948. London District secretary CPGB from mid-1930s. Played leading part in anti-fascist movement 1934–1938. Led occupations of underground stations during Nazi air raids. Elected to London County Council 1946. Organised squatting of vacant luxury flats after war. Tried for conspiracy to trespass and bound over. In late 1940s left London and full-time politics to become a farmer.

**Emile Burns** (1889–1972). Joined CPGB from ILP left wing 1921. Member of Central Committee 1935–1957, also of Political Bureau. Head of CPGB Propaganda Department. Leading member of Labour Research Department. Prolific writer and populariser of Marxism, instrumental in spreading socialist ideas to colonies. Involved in Friends of the Soviet Union and Busmen's Rank and File Movement in 1930s.

**John Ross (Johnny) Campbell** (1894–1969). Joined BSP 1912, foundation member CPGB 1920. Member of Central Committee CPGB 1923–1965. Member of Political Bureau 1924–1939, and later until 1965. Member of ECCI 1925–1935, candidate member of ECCI from 1935. Charged with sedition while acting editor of CPGB paper, *Workers' Weekly*, 1924; case then dropped, precipitating collapse of 1924 Labour Government. Imprisoned 1925 with eleven other communist leaders for seditious conspiracy. Foreign editor, *Daily Worker* 1932–1934; assistant editor 1937–1939, and 1942–1949. *Daily Worker* editor briefly in 1939 (replaced October 1939 by W. Rust), and again from 1949–1959. Remained in CPGB employment 1939–1942.

**Maurice Cornforth** (1909–1980). Joined CPGB 1931, Eastern Countries district organiser from 1934, member of Central Committee 1935–1943. Manager of Lawrence & Wishart (publishers) 1950–1975, author of several books on Marxist philosophy.

**William Cowe** (1905–1989). Railwayman, joined CPGB from ILP 1924. Member of CPGB Central Committee 1938–1943. Held various full-time party posts in Scottish district. Studied at Lenin School, Moscow, 1934–1935.

**Idris Cox** (1899–1989). A miner, joined CPGB 1924. South Wales organiser, CPGB, 1927–1930. National Organiser, CPGB from 1930. Helped organise NUWM and hunger marches in 1930s. Editor, *Daily Worker*, 1935–1936. South Wales district secretary 1939–1951. Secretary of CPGB international department 1951–1969. Member of CPGB central committee 1929–1952. Delegate to 6th (1928) and 7th (1935) congresses of Communist International.

**George Crane** (1897–1967). Engineering worker, prosecuted for initiating strikes in 1914–1918 war. Foundation member CPGB, member of Central

Committee 1935–1943. Between wars was AEU local official, led 1938 strike against time-and-motion at Rover, Birmingham. Involved with Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards' National Council during war, and threatened with expulsion from AEU, 1940. Threat later withdrawn, and was elected AEU National Organiser 1943–1949, and 1957–1959.

**Rajani Palme Dutt** (1896–1974). Oxford scholar and war resister in First World War, joined CPGB 1920 from ILP left wing, member of Central Committee 1922–1965, member of Political Bureau for most of that period. Founded *Labour Monthly* (q.v.) 1921, edited it until his death. Editor of *Daily Worker* 1936–1938. Worked for Comintern in Brussels in mid-1920s. Attended various meetings of ECCI. Delegate to 6th (1928) and 7th (1935) congresses of Comintern, elected candidate member of ECCI in 1935. Prolific writer on Marxism, India, imperialism and general politics.

**William Gallacher** (1881–1965). Engineering worker, active in temperance movement from early 1900s, joined socialist movement 1906. Involved with various groups, one of Clydeside shop stewards' leaders in First World War. Shop Stewards' delegate to 2nd Communist International congress, 1920; convinced by Lenin of need for communist party. Joined CPGB with Communist Labour Party in 1921. Member of central committee 1922–1963, and of political bureau to 1945. Jailed 1921, also one of 12 communist leaders jailed 1925, MP for West Fife 1935–1950. Chairman of CPGB 1950–1956, President 1956–1965. Author of numerous pamphlets and articles, also several volumes of autobiography. Alternate member of ECCI from 1924, full ECCI member and member of presidium 1926–1935, alternate member of presidium from 1935.

**John Gollan** (1911–1977). Joined CPGB 1927 while apprentice painter in Scotland. Jailed for six months 1931 for distributing anti-war leaflets to Edinburgh troops.

General secretary, Young Communist League 1935–1939. Member of Central Committee from 1935. North-East district secretary, CPGB 1939–1941, Scottish district secretary, 1941–1947. General secretary, CPGB 1956–1975. First editor of *Marxism Today* from 1957. Books include *Youth in British Industry* (1937) *Scottish Prospect* (1944) and *The British Political System* (1954).

**Finlay Hart** (1901–1989) Shipyard worker, joined CPGB from SLP 1922. Belonged to Communist Party of Canada 1923–1926. CPGB delegate to 7th congress, Communist International, 1935. Was Clydebank councillor before war. Became CPGB Scottish district organiser in 1935. Secretary of South Yorkshire district 1940–1942. Member, Central Committee CPGB 1935–1943 and 1949–1963. Returned to industry after 1939, closely involved with Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards' National Council.

**Marian Jessop** (later: Marian Ramelson) (1908–1967). Involved as teenager in socialist movement. Joined CPGB 1932 in Yorkshire on expulsion from Labour Party. At Lenin School in Moscow 1935–1937. From 1937, CPGB organiser in Yorkshire West Riding. Member, central committee CPGB 1938–1943 and 1952–1954. Author of *The Petticoat Rebellion*.

**Peter Kerrigan** (1899–1977). Engineering worker, joined CPGB 1921. Scottish district secretary CPGB 1930–1943, National Organiser CPGB 1943–1953, Industrial Organiser CPGB 1953–1966. Member of Central Committee, CPGB 1927–1929 and 1932–1965, and of Political Bureau from wartime to 1965. Political commissar with International Brigade in Spain, and *Daily Worker* correspondent there from 1937. Delegate to 7th congress of Communist International 1935, elected to its International Control Commission.

**Hymie Lee** (1903–1953). Joined CPGB around 1923, active in leadership of North-West and North-East CPGB



districts. Member of Executive Committee 1948–1949. In 1939 was North-East district secretary, remained in North-East leadership until 1951.

**Harry Pollitt** (1890–1960). Boilermaker, involved in ILP and later BSP. Active opponent of British intervention in Russia 1919–1920. Foundation member CPGB, 1920. Member of Central Committee and Political Bureau 1922–1960 (removed from Political Bureau October 1939, reinstated by 1941). General Secretary CPGB 1929 to October 1939, and July 1941–1956. Jailed 1925 with eleven other CPGB leaders on charge of ‘seditious conspiracy’. Involved in leadership of Comintern and Red International of Labour Unions (RILU, Profintern) from early 1920s. Founder of British RILU affiliate, National Minority Movement in 1924. Member of ECCI from 1924 to 1943 and of its Presidium. Author of numerous CPGB pamphlets and autobiography *Serving My Time*.

**James Roche** (1909–1988). Tailor, joined CPGB 1930. Held various elected posts in Yorkshire district CPGB from 1930. Elected to Central Committee 1938, drafted into army 1941. Full-time CPGB worker in Leeds 1951–1957. Resigned from CPGB 1957.

**William (Bill) Rust** (1903–1949). Joined CPGB while working as newspaper office clerk 1920, also founder member and early leader of YCL. YCL representative on central committee CPGB from 1923, elected to central committee 1926, member also of Political Bureau to 1949. Jailed with eleven other CPGB leaders 1925. Attended 6th congress of Communist International and 5th congress of Young Communist International (YCI) in 1928, and elected to leadership of YCI. Editor of *Daily Worker* 1930–1932 and 1939–1949.

**James (Jimmy) Shields** (1900–1949). Born in Scotland, joined CPGB 1921, emigrated to South Africa 1924. Opposed racial segregation, became general secretary, Communist Party of South Africa, 1924, held position

until returned to Britain 1927. Member of CPGB central committee 1929–1937. Editor of *Daily Worker* 1933–1935. At various times member of political bureau, head of industrial department and head of organisational department CPGB. Member of control commission (later appeals committee) CPGB 1937–1949, also worked in CPGB international department to 1949. Delegate to 7th congress of Communist International, 1935. Served on Comintern's International Control Commission.

**Douglas Frank (Dave) Springhall** (1901–1953). Seaman, founder member CPGB 1920. On executive of YCL from 1923. Member of Central Committee, 1932–1943. Held various CPGB posts – London district organiser in mid-1930s, edited *Daily Worker* around 1938, CPGB representative to Communist International in 1939, then national organiser CPGB. Political commissar with International Brigade in Spain. Caught receiving classified information from an Air Ministry official, 1943. Sentenced to seven years imprisonment (served five) and expelled from CPGB. Spent last years in China, died in Moscow.

**Robert (Bob) Stewart** (1877–1973). Scottish worker, involved in trade union and prohibition movements from early youth. Internationalist and war-resister in First World War, foundation member CPGB 1920. Member of Central Committee, CPGB 1922–1929 and 1935–1936. From 1936 chairman of CPGB Control Commission. Acting general secretary of CPGB 1925–1926 while 12 CPGB leaders in jail. Attended ECCI 1923 plenum in Moscow, CPGB permanent representative at Comintern to 1924. Attended 5th Comintern congress 1924, elected to ECCI. Published autobiography *Breaking the Fetters*, 1967.

**William Whittaker** (b. 1908). Textile worker, active in Colne labour movement from 1926, sympathetic to CPGB. Joined CPGB from Labour Party 1938, elected that year to CPGB Central Committee. NE Lancashire CPGB organiser 1939, held variety of local CPGB posts until

returning to industry 1953. Remains active in labour movement today.

**Bert Williams** (1895–1958). Welsh miner, joined CPGB 1921. Spent some time in 1920s working with the Comintern in Brussels. Member of CPGB Central Committee 1932–1935. Political commissar in Spain at Battle of Brunete, 1937. Midlands district organiser in 1939, subsequently Birmingham city organiser. Engineer during Second World War, held variety of labour movement posts until his death.

*Non-Participants*

**Colonel Józef Beck** (1894–1944). Close ally of Polish leader Piłsudski. Deputy Prime Minister of Poland in 1930, Minister of Foreign Affairs 1932–1939.

**Mick Bennett** (b. 1913). Joined CPGB 1931. General secretary of YCL from 1939 to late 1943. 1944–late 1945, Yorkshire district organiser, then Yorkshire district secretary, CPGB. Co-opted onto central committee 1939, elected member 1947–1957. National organiser, CPGB from 1951, assistant editor of *Daily Worker* 1954–1957. Relinquished party responsibilities 1957, later left CPGB.

**Léon Blum** (1872–1950). French socialist politician, deputy to French parliament from 1919. Prime Minister of first French Popular Front government 1936–1937. Survived trial by wartime Vichy government and internment in Germany to become Prime Minister again briefly post-war. Blum was unpopular with communists in autumn 1939 due to his alledged support for government measures against the French CP.

**Stafford Cripps** (1889–1952). Joined Labour Party 1929, elected MP for West Bristol 1931. Founder member 1932 of Socialist League, a left Labour group. Expelled from Labour Party 1938 for public advocacy of popular front. Remained independent MP until readmitted to Labour

Party 1945. Held important posts in 1945–1950 Labour government, including Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Cripps consistently advocated British-Soviet co-operation, and was keen to distance the USSR from Nazi Germany. As British ambassador to the USSR 1940–1942, Cripps was important in cementing the alliance.

**Edouard Daladier** (1884–1970). French Radical politician, defence minister in first Popular Front government, 1936. Became Prime Minister on defeat of Popular Front in 1938. Signatory of Munich agreement, 1938, which gave Hitler part of Czechoslovakia. Daladier's administration suppressed the French CP in the early stages of World War 2.

**Georgi Dimitrov** (1882–1949). Bulgarian Communist, joined Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party 1902, elected to Bulgarian parliament 1913. Opposed First World War, a founder of Bulgarian CP 1919. In emigration from 1923. Imprisoned in Germany by the Nazis, accused of starting Reichstag fire, 1933. Conducted own defence in celebrated trial, acquitted end 1933. From 1934 de facto leader of Comintern, appointed general secretary following 7th congress, 1935. Dimitrov's anti-fascist prestige was very important for gaining acceptance for the Comintern anti-war line from September 1939. Returned to Bulgaria from Moscow 1945, head of Bulgarian government from 1946.

**Evžen Fried** (1900–1943). Hungarian-Czechoslovak communist, active from time of Hungarian Soviet Republic 1919. Joined Czechoslovak CP 1921, elected to its central committee 1923. In Comintern apparatus from 1924. 1931–1939, permanent Comintern representative in Paris, using pseudonym 'Clément'. Probably shot by Gestapo, but the circumstances of his death in Brussels are unclear.

**Arthur Greenwood** (1880–1954). Labour politician, MP for Nelson and Colne 1929–1931, and for Wakefield from 1932. Minister of Health 1929–1931. Deputy leader of

Labour Party from 1935. Member of Churchill's war cabinet 1940–1942. Held various posts in Attlee government.

**Esther Henrotte** (1896–1981). Member of CPGB, active in Co-op movement. Member of Central Committee CPGB 1935–1937, and of Executive Committee 1943–1947. Member of Management Committee of Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society 1939–1959.

**Thomas Alfred (Tommy) Jackson** (1879–1955). In socialist movement before 1900, belonged to various socialist groups. Founder member of CPGB 1920, member of central committee to 1929. In mid-1920s editor of CPGB paper *Workers' Weekly*, jailed 1926 for articles on general strike. A talented and sometimes unorthodox populariser of Marxism, his works include *Dialectics* (1936) and *Ireland Her Own* (1947).

**Dmitry Manuilsky** (1883–1959). Joined Russian Social-Democrats in 1903, belonged to various factions before rejoining Bolsheviks with Trotsky and others in 1917. Performed international assignments for the Bolsheviks from 1919, member of the ECCI and its Presidium 1924–1943. Manuilsky was a signatory of the Comintern's dissolution in 1943.

**André Marty** (1886–1956). Naval engineer, involved in Black Sea naval revolt of 1918, joined French CP in 1923. Member of Central Committee 1925–1953, Communist deputy in French parliament 1924–1928 and 1929–1955. Participant in Comintern leading bodies from 1925, member of ECCI 1932–1943, member of ECCI Presidium and Secretariat 1935–1943. Expelled from PCF in 1953, charged with factionalism and being a police agent.

**J.T. Walton Newbold** (1888–1955). Propagandist and writer, joined ILP 1910, and CPGB with ILP left wing 1921. MP for Motherwell (elected as communist) 1922–1923. Resigned from CPGB 1924.

**Philip Noel-Baker** (1889–1982). Labour politician, MP for Coventry 1929–1931, Derby and Derby South 1936–1970. Life Peer from 1977. Involved throughout his career in foreign affairs and peace questions.

**Morgan Philips Price** (1885–1973). Landowner, journalist and politician. Liberal candidate 1914, *Manchester Guardian* correspondent in Russia 1914–1918, sympathetic to revolution. Joined ILP and Labour Party 1919, belonged briefly to CPGB in early 1920s. Labour MP 1929–1931 and 1935–1959.

**Emmanuel Shinwell** (1884–1986). Labour politician, MP for Linlithgow 1922–1924 and 1928–1931, Seaham 1935–1950, and Easington 1950–1970. Life peer from 1970. Held minor posts in 1924 and 1929 Labour governments. Minister of Fuel and Power 1945–1947, Secretary of State for War 1947–1950, Minister of Defence 1950–1951. Chair of Parliamentary Labour Party 1964–1967.

**William Strang** (1893–1978). British diplomat and Conservative politician. In Britain's Moscow Embassy in early 1930s. Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in 1939, sent to Moscow by Chamberlain in summer 1939 to advise British negotiating team on Anglo-Soviet agreement.

**Ernst Thälmann** (1886–1944). German communist. Social-democrat from 1903, joined German CP with Independent Social-Democratic Party left wing in 1920. Elected to Reichstag 1924. Chairman of German CP from 1925. CP presidential candidate 1925 and 1932. Arrested after Nazi seizure of power 1933, held in prison and concentration camps, executed 1944. Attended third Comintern congress 1921, member of ECCI and Comintern leadership from 1924.

**Palmiro Togliatti (Ercoli)** (1893–1964). Italian communist. Joined Socialist Party 1914, founder member of Italian CP 1921. On PCI central committee from 1922, became

general secretary 1927. Member of ECCI and its Presidium from 1924, member also of Secretariat from 1926. Head of Comintern secretariat for Western Europe from 1936. Comintern representative to Spanish CP central committee 1937–1939. Signatory to Comintern dissolution 1943. After 1956, played important part in developing Italian CP's ideological independence.

**Emile Vandervelde** (1866–1938). Belgian socialist, lawyer and politician. Leading figure in Belgian Labour Party and Second International from 1890s. President of Second International 1900–1914. Joined Belgian government in 1914 after Germany's attack, arguing that Belgium had the right to defend itself, and supported Allied cause. From 1917 active also in defence of Russian non-Bolshevik socialists.

**Jenő (Eugen) Varga** (1870–1964). Hungarian economist, social-democrat before First World War. Joined Hungarian CP February 1919, People's Commissar for Finance in Hungarian Soviet Republic of March 1919. Emigrated to USSR 1920, joined Bolshevik Party and was continuously involved with Comintern. Alternate member of ECCI from 1928. Headed USSR Institute of World economy and Politics from 1927.

Varga published quarterly reviews of the world economy in *International Press Correspondence* (Inprecorr), a Comintern publication.

**Andrei Zhdanov** (1896–1948). Joined Bolshevik Party 1915, rose rapidly through its hierarchy. Loyal ally of J.V. Stalin. Zhdanov succeeded S.M. Kirov in 1934 as head of Leningrad CPSU. Elected member of ECCI 1935, party to Comintern dissolution 1943. Best known for his post-war campaign against nonconformism in Soviet culture, and as founder of Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in 1947.

## *Glossary of Abbreviations*

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
BSP	British Socialist Party
CI	Communist International
Comintern	
CP	Communist Party
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DPC	District Party Committee
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
ILP	Independent Labour Party
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
YCI	Young Communist International
YCL	Young Communist League



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